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# THE HOUSE

—OF—

# FIVE GABLES.

BY

MARY JOHNSON HOLMES.

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MARY JOHNSON HOLMES,

AUTHOR OF

“ASHES,” “SINS OF THE FATHERS,” “A FAIR PURITAN,” ETC.

40  
Columbian  
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# THE HOUSE OF FIVE GABLES.

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## BOOK THE FIRST.

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### CHAPTER I.

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MANY years ago there stood on a high bluff over-looking the island which is now the site of a portion of Wheeling, West Virginia, a house known far and near as the house of five gables. It was built of sand-stone and brick; the gables were of wood; it was not a thing of beauty, and a beholder seeing it for the first time, was sure to pause and exclaim at its rare ugliness, which enchained the eye; and its quaint irregular shape appealed in a way to one's feelings, much as a crippled, mishapen being might have done. It had not always been thus. It began life as a modest story-and-a-half cottage, and for several years could only boast of two gables, but with a change of owners there came a change of architecture also, until if old Sir Roger Willing, the original builder, could have risen from his grave he would have found it difficult to have discovered a foot of his own handiwork.

Old Sir Roger's great grandfather was one of the hundred settlers sent from England by Sir Thomas Gates in the year 1607, and settled in Jamestown; and rumor whispered that it was he who bought twenty African negroes from a Dutch man-of-war, and so introduced negro slavery into Virginia in the year 1619.

Sir Roger himself was not long behind Governor Spotswood in crossing the Blue Ridge, and forming a home in what, after more than a century, became West Virginia.



There had always been a Roger Willing from that time until now. An elder son, who kept the old ancestral home, adding to it odd corners as the fancy took him, and dying bequeathed it to another Roger, with the solemn injunction never to sell or part with it come what might. There had been some good Rogers, and there had been some very, very bad ones. Strange tales were wont to be whispered of the goings on inside the old gray walls under the reign of "Jolly Prince Roger," a grandson of old Roger the fourth. That was in 1763, when Benjamin Harrison was Governor, and when Wheeling was known as Fort Henry. Young "Prince Roger" had just come into his kingdom as it were, meaning the old stone house now boasting three gables and numberless added corners; many acres of tobacco, and a prolific bank account. Rogers father had been a man with one idea; to make money. The idea how to spend it he had never cultivated, therefore Roger upon coming into possession of what his father had so carefully hoarded, speedily set to work to make ducks and drakes of it, and he gathered about him plenty of profligate assistants, who helped him turn night into day, and day into night, until their wild orgies became the talk for miles around.

A beautiful slave girl was installed housekeeper, and she ruled with a high hand. She ordered a new wing to be added to the old house, and another gable. Stained glass, a great rarity in those days, was brought from foreign parts, and fitted as windows in the new gable. Costly carpets, and tapestries of foreign make covered the floors and walls. Rare treasures costing fabulous prices, were scattered lavishly about the rooms; unique chandeliers of brass fishes filled with sperm oil, the light issuing from the fishes' mouths, were wonders to the class of visitors who worshipped at Bella's shrine. Here she reigned queen for ten years, until one morning, Roger woke up to find himself at the end of his resources. All his ready money squandered. The old house mortgaged, and a fair prospect of being without a place to lay his head ere many months should pass. He was dazed, bewildered, as the truth became a certainty, and he wandered over the fair lands which any day might be snatched from him, bemoaning his fate, and cursing it as well. His companions in prosperity had



all fled at the first hint of adversity, as fair weather friends have a habit of doing, and he had no one to advise him in his hour of trouble.

The man to whom the property was mortgaged called occasionally, "to gloat"—as Roger said—"over the prospect of in time possessing the fair estate."

"But by heavens! he never *shall* be master here. Never! Not if I have to sell my soul to the devil to get the money," was Roger's cry. He went to Bella for suggestions as to the best course to pursue, but she merely laughed at him.

"Do as I do," she told him. Don't bother your head over nothing. It don't pay. It only makes you wrinkled and old, years before your time. Sell the old rattletrap. It ain't mortgaged for near what its worth, and the money you have left over will keep us for a few years anyhow."

"I can't sell it," Roger answered. "More's the pity. I'm bound by word to the dead."

"Bound by your fiddlesticks!" laughed Bella scornfully. "What will the dead ever know or care about it; you *are* a soft head; ha, ha, ha!"

Roger went out leaving Bella still laughing. He was disgusted, weary. Yes, almost tired of life, and he walked around the grounds to a little lake which he had made for Bella's pleasure. The water was deep enough to drown one, if one chose to just lie down without a struggle, and it would be an easy way to end it all; but something whispered that such a mode of escape would be cowardly, and with all his faults, the one of cowardice had never been laid to Roger Willing.

For days his mind continued in a state bordering on lunacy. Then like a ray of sunlight, there came to him a letter from across the seas. It was from a great uncle, his grandfather's brother, who had not taken kindly to American soil, and had gone to the land of his ancestors, there to build up a colossal fortune. He had only one heir, a son, who dying left a daughter, Mary Willing. This child had now arrived at a marrying age. There was no one good enough for her in all England. Many letters had travelled between Roger's father and Mary's. They had had it in their minds to unite the English sovereign with the American dollar; but Mary was at that time too young, and Roger's father had died ere he could



express his desires to his son. Now, Grandpa Willing being Mary's guardian, had thought it about time to broach the subject to his brother's grandson. If he was heart free would he come over to old England, and form Mary's acquaintance? She had sixty thousand pounds in her own right, and when her old grandfather died, her dot would be considerably increased.

Roger stared at the letter, and could hardly realize his own good fortune. Going to England in those days could not be called a pleasure trip. It meant many weeks of rough tossing on angry billows. Of a possible loss of life, but Roger gave not one thought to the dangers or privations attendant to his journey. He looked forward to the golden goal at the end, and cared not for what came between. He went to the richest man in Fort Henry and showed him the letter, asking him if he would advance a thousand dollars on a second mortgage, for he felt confident of winning his cousin's affections. The man consented, and Roger made ready for his journey in great glee. To Bella he said, "that if he wanted to save his home he must go abroad," which was true enough.

"Give me and my child our freedom papers," cried Bella, excitedly. "You always said you would, but you've put it off as you do everything, and if you are lost at sea, and never come back, we shall be sold to the Lord knows who."

"All right, honey, I'll tend to it sure before I go," replied Roger, carelessly, and as a matter of course he forgot all about it, the time came, and he sailed away with Bella's loud wailing ringing in his ears.

He reached England in safety, and found his cousin all that her grandfather had pictured her; bright, rosy-cheeked, and if she lacked beauty, still she was good to look upon, and the golden sovereigns at her command, gave a wonderful luster to her otherwise commonplace appearance.

Roger's wooing was short, but most satisfactory to all concerned. Mary adored her handsome cousin. He was so very different from any young man she had ever known. His rather free manners attracted and repelled her at the same time; but she fell more deeply in love every day, so that Roger's proposal was hardly to be called one, for he just said: "Mary, when shall we be



married?" While she answered, meekly: "Whenever you please, Roger."

"The sooner the better then," was his reply. "It's a great nuisance this getting married. It should be abolished."

Grandpa Willing was more than satisfied with Roger's account of his possessions. He made him describe over and over the old house with its many rooms and queer angles. Roger told of the goodly bank account which his father left, also of the vast fields of tobacco, but he forgot to mention the heavy mortgage resting upon the home; and the old man rubbed his hands gleefully at the wedding which he had brought about so skillfully.

It is not necessary to linger over the brief betrothal, or the happy bridal, for at least to one of the participants, the wedding morning was the happiest of her hitherto uneventful life, and just before she was led by a bevy of laughing bridesmaids to meet the bridegroom, she devoutly knelt in the privacy of her chamber, and thanked God for the treasure about to become hers; for the gift of an honest man's love, and she asked for a divine blessing to rest on her beloved from that time forth.

As for Roger, he drew on his gloves with an air of ennui, and confidentially remarked to his mirror, that if it were not for those golden sovereigns beckoning him on, he would flunk at the last moment, for the very thought of marriage was distasteful to him; and at the altar, as the clergyman asked in solemn tones, "Wilt thou have this woman to be thy lawful wedded wife?" it was not Mary whom he saw standing by his side, but one of dusker hue, who raised her appealing eyes to his and asked that justice be done her and hers. He heard again that despairing cry which had been the last sound to fall upon his ears as he had driven from his home, and it is no wonder that he cast a wild glance behind him, ere his trembling lips whispered faintly, "I do." But no voice denouncing him interrupted the ceremony, which bound a trusting, God-fearing woman, to an unscrupulous atheist, and Roger drew a deep breath of relief as he found himself outside the church, away from the nodding, gaping crowd, who to his excited fancy all seemed to point jeeringly at him; and although it was a bitter cold day, great drops of mois-



ture stood on his face, which Mary in true wifely fashion brushed away with her dainty cobweb handkerchief; thereby taking upon herself a bondage which was never broken, until death claimed her husband.

Roger's true character was soon revealed to Mary. The honeymoon had hardly waned ere her idol lay shattered at her feet. He had decided to do Paris, and one or two gambling places before he started for America, and Mary followed where ere her lord and master led. She spent one delightful week in Paris, driving, walking, dining with Roger, and then, the heavenly blue of her sky was suddenly overcast by a dark threatening cloud which never entirely lifted through all her life.

She remembered that day so well in after years. She had been more gay than usual, singing ridiculous little nursery songs all to herself, as she dressed in evening costume, so as to be ready the moment Roger came in. Roger did not like to be kept waiting "dear fellow," and they were going to the opera of which Mary was passionately fond. She donned a pretty blue silk flounced to the waist, each flounce edged with priceless lace. Roger had admired it above all her other dresses, so of course none other must be worn. After dressing she sat down to await his coming, and she waited long. The moments grew into hours, and still he did not come. Supper time came and passed. The hour on which they should have been starting for the opera was struck off saucily, by the little clock on the mantle, yet he was absent, and Mary walked the floor, wringing her hands in wild despair, imagining all sorts of horrors. Now she saw his dear form torn and bleeding, being pulled from beneath the feet of prancing steeds; again, she was viewing his lifeless body as it was tenderly placed at her feet by strangers, and it was with a cry of almost gladness, that just as the dawn was breaking she heard muffled voices at the door. "Thank God! the uncertainty was over. Better anything than this awful suspense which was driving her mad." She thought she heard a laugh. "Ah! then he was not dead. No person, however heartless, could laugh if death were near them." She tremblingly slid back the bolt.

"Stand him up against the door," she heard a voice in French say.

"What are you talking about?" another voice an-



swered. "He can't stand. He's too far gone for that."

Mary groaned, and dreading what her eyes might behold, she opened the door just as Roger called feebly: "Shay, you fel—felis, don' go off an' leave a fel like this; hic, I'm sick, awful sick, hic, so I am."

Mary saw two men going down the dimly-lighted hall, and realizing her inability to lift or drag the burly form of her husband inside, she called, indignantly: "Come back and assist me. Are you devoid of all human feeling, that you desert a fellow-being in distress?"

The men turned at her call, and she saw that one was the night porter, while the other a stranger, was in full evening dress. He lifted his hat respectfully, and stooped over Roger, shaking him vigorously.

"Arouse yourself," he said in French.

"Speak United States," muttered Roger, "I don't unstan' beastly la'guage. United States only la'guage in whole world, whole world, do you hear? An' I'll fight er'body who says taint."

Both men laughed, while Mary wrung her hands, crying, "Oh, what has happened him?" Then remembering that perhaps neither of these men could understand English, she turned to the porter and said in French: "Tell me what has happened to Monsieur Willing. Has he become suddenly insane?"

The porter looked at the stranger and smiled. "He knows," he answered.

Mary turned inquiringly to the stranger, who again bowed profoundly. "Monsieur is not ill, Madame. Only a little indisposed. He has been spending the night among a jolly lot of fellows. He lost rather heavily at cards, and naturally took a few glasses too much. He will be all right by morning."

"A few glasses too much," echoed Mary, starting back. "Do you mean to infer that he is drunk?"

The stranger bowed his head, saying softly: "That word might be applied to his condition outside polite society. We seldom use so harsh an appellation."

"Oh!" said Mary, looking with disgust at the form at her feet, "thank you for being so considerate of my feelings. It seems I have much to learn in regard to polite *French* society. We English call things by their proper names. Take him inside and then go."



When Mary was left alone with her husband who had fallen into a drunken slumber, she sat and gazed at him long and earnestly. Her thoughts were far from being pleasant ones. "So this is the end of my happy marriage which I foolishly thought could never be anything but happy. A sweet dream rudely broken in one short week. What have I done that I should be so harshly punished? Tenderly cherished by a fond, adoring father, and taught by him to abhor vice in any form; and after his death surrounded by the protecting love of my dear grandfather, how can I cope with this horror which has so suddenly been thrust upon me. Can I go to grandfather with my trouble? Ah, no. He is old, and the knowledge of my unhappiness might send him to his grave. I must adopt some severe plan by which to cure my husband of this evil which will so soon wreck his life, and my own, if he continues. Yes, that is the better plan, but how shall I begin? Is not my woman's wit equal to this emergency? It should be."

She sat for some few moments in deep thought. Then she arose with an air of determination, saying: "The remedy is severe, but if it only effects a cure I can rejoice."

She bent over the sleeping man and pinched him several times, calling him by name. He slept on. The only difference being that he snored more musically than before. Mary smiled. "He will never know," she whispered. Then stepping to his dressing room, she brought forth his shaving materials. She had often watched him shave, and thought it an easy matter to handle a razor. She did not think so now when, after lathering well his head, she attempted to remove the hair without cutting the scalp. She stopped in despair after three unsuccessful attempts. Then with renewed energy which challenged defeat, she began again, and in a short time, though it could not be called a work of art, Roger's head was shorn of its curly black locks, and Mary viewed her work with satisfaction. She called a servant and despatched him for a pound of mustard, and when she received it she was not long in making several plasters, and applying them to various parts of Roger's body where their superior qualities would be appreciated the most. Then she sat down to await the result. She had not changed her pretty dress. It was



nearly ruined, but she did not give a thought to that. She wanted Roger to see her still in evening dress.

Presently a groan followed by another still louder told that her patient was awakening. "Water, water," he moaned, "for God's sake give me water! I'm burning to death. Am I in hell? Mary, Mary, where are you? Where am I? What has happened me?"

Mary knelt by his side. "Oh Roger! dear Roger, how thankful I am to hear you speak once more. You have been very, very ill."

"Then I *am* on earth," he said feebly, trying to raise his head from the pillow so as to gaze fully upon the familiar objects scattered about. "I thought I'd got 'em again, or something. Suffering Job, what am I in, a bed of fire? Talk of torments. There is no worse torment than this."

He uttered another cry which rang through the room.

Mary turned her face to hide her smiles, and said sweetly: "They are only mustard plasters dear husband. Don't revile them. They have saved your life. They are grandfather's great cure-all's for every ill and——"

"Damn grandfather and his plasters!" broke in Roger, savagely grinding his teeth. "Take 'em off. Do you hear me? Take 'em off."

Mary was willing to obey, as by this time a good blister from each one was sure to have matured, but she moderately took her time. "Not until you beg my pardon for swearing at grandfather. You have good cause to bless him, for if it had not been for his remedy you would surely have died."

"Father Isaac and all the patriarchs! will you stop your silly twaddle, and remove these rags, or by heaven! when they do come off I'll clap 'em on to you."

Mary knew that she was safe, for on both palms was a generous supply of mustard.

"Say you are sorry for what you said, then I will."

I won't, not if I die for it. I'll ring for a servant. He leaped from the couch only to fall back with a groan. More mustard on the soles of his feet. "Do you want to kill me?" he yelled.

"Far from it Roger, darling. I only want to make you well."

"Thank you," hesneered, "you are succeeding admir-



ably. Oh, Mary, Mary, for the love of heaven, will you take them off?"

Mary looked at him.

"I'm sorry, oh yes. I'm sorry I said that awful word. I'm so sorry, that if I had your grandfather here I'd make him eat the whole business."

Mary smiled, and slowly undid the bandages from his feet. "You have said you are sorry, dear. That is sufficient without emphasizing it. I know how you feel. Grandfather is always irritable after using them."

Roger muttered something which sounded suspiciously like a repetition of his fond speech on grandfather, but Mary wisely closed her ears, and as the last bandage was removed, Roger gave a huge sigh of relief, and said: "Now, tell me the meaning of this idiotic performance, and why you have tortured me with that old man's infernal remedy; but hold on, there's one on my head yet, you didn't take off."

"Oh no, dear, I didn't put any on your head."

Much obliged for your thoughtfulness. Something is the matter, though. It feels as if it had been scalped."

"I only shaved it, dear Roger. That's all."

"That's all!" he gasped. By the jumping jupiter! ain't that enough? What in Tophet did I marry you for, I wonder?"

"Because you loved me."

"That's all bosh. I never cared a rap for you." He laughed harshly, enjoying the look of pain and fear upon her face.

"Then you did not even love me when you were courting me?"

"Not a picaune. I've got a yellow girl home I care more for than I do for you. How do you like that?"

Mary buried her face in her hands and sobbed bitterly. Her idol's coarse, brutal character stood fully revealed. The thin veneer was brushed like a cobweb from the rotten porous wood, exposing the architect's poor carpentering.

"I will go home to my grandfather," she sobbed.

"All right, go. You've got my full consent, but remember, you can't take a cent of your sixty thousand pounds along. That became mine when you did, and I mean to hold on to it,"



## CHAPTER II.

MARY spent many weary hours trying to settle in her own mind what course to pursue, whilst Roger was confined to his bed, cursing the blisters which prevented him from walking, cursing Mary, her grandfather, and all her ancestors in the same breath. She felt nothing but disgust toward the man whom she had promised to love, honor and obey. What was there in such a man to honor? He had told her in horrible language that the first use which he should make of his feet would be to go on a protracted spree, and she would see no more of him for a month. He added with an oath "that he knew better than to come back for a second dose of mustard."

She had written several letters to her grandfather, asking his advice as to what she had better do, but as yet she had received no reply. By his wise decision she would abide, feeling sure that he would point out the right way. She had not changed in her general bearing toward Roger. She waited on his every whim with wifely solicitude, but without the endearing words or loving caresses, which she would have bestowed one week ago. He was still her husband, and would remain so until death claimed either. She could not forget that. She owed him a certain amount of obedience, further than that he could not force her to do his will.

"Why don't you talk once in a while, or tell me a good story?" he said to her one day. "You are like a death's head at a feast, and about as cheerful as one would be, I should judge."

"I have nothing to talk about," she answered, wearily.

"Then invent something. If Bella were only here now, she'd make things lively for me. Not a dull hour in the day. She can dance, she can sing, she can do anything."

Mary compressed her lips for a moment, and then said calmly:

"Then you intend to keep that slave girl?"

"Ain't at all likely that I shall part with her, Mrs.



Willing. She is too valuable. She's only twenty-six. Look at the family she's likely to raise. Every pickaninny will be worth a hundred to five. Part with Bella? Well, I reckon not."

Mary shuddered. To hear her husband talk so cold-bloodedly of traffic in human souls, made her heart sick. Was he devoid of all human feeling? She would try him and see.

"How much money would you want for all your slaves, if you were going to sell them?" she asked quietly.

"Oh about five thousand, I rec'on. I haven't many now. I sold a good many last Spring, but I'll buy a good lot more when I go back."

She knelt by his chair, and clasped his arm with her hands, looking pleadingly up into his face. "Roger, I have never asked a favor of you since our marriage. You know how I abhor slavery. I cannot understand it, and never shall. I cannot imagine one human being selling others as if they were cattle without soul or feeling. Let me buy them of you, Roger. I will free them, and hire them to work on your plantation. Then, parents would not be torn away from their children, as you say is often the case now, and God would bless us for doing right in his eyes."

Roger burst into a loud guffaw. "That's rich. By thunder! if it ain't. You would take my money to purchase my slaves, then liberate them. What do I make by the deal?"

"But I am speaking of *my* money, Roger. Surely I have a right to do as I please with my own."

"With mine own," mimicked Roger. "And pray tell me what is your own? Look at your marriage contract, madam, and see what that tells you. Everything belonging you became mine when I married you. Do you think I would have married you else? You can't touch a farthing of it without my consent."

"And do you mean to say that you would refuse to give me a paltry thousand pounds of my own money to do as I please with it?"

"You have understood my meaning fully, my lady. Not a sixpence do you get out of me for the purpose of liberating my slaves. I'd give you any amount you wanted for any other purpose."

Mary rose in indignation, and raised her hand warn-



ingly. "Then beware, Roger Willing, of what is coming. I saw it as I knelt beside you, I see it now. God will send a terrible calamity upon you." She bent forward as if she saw some awful vision before her, and Roger watched her, fascinated. Be warned in time, miserable man, and repent ere God's wrath overtakes you."

Roger placed his hands before his eyes, and tried in vain to steady his voice as he shouted: "Cease your idle croaking, woman; you are enough to drive one mad. Have you not seen and heard of the Willing temper which stops at nothing when once aroused? Shall I give you a specimen of it now; now, I say?" His voice rose almost to a shriek, while his face became purple with rage.

It was now Mary's turn to become frightened, for he had every appearance of a mad man. "Roger, Roger," she cried, "constrain yourself. I will say no more. You shall have your will in everything, and if evil befalls you, do not say that you had no warning."

For many days after this, comparative quiet reigned between Mary and Roger. She maintained a dignified silence, and spoke only when spoken to, while Roger spent his time mostly in grumbling at everybody, and everything that came near enough to him to cause him displeasure, but this forced peace was rudely broken one day by a message to Mary. Her grandfather was dead, and had been buried several days. She was needed in England, being sole heir to all his wealth. Roger smiled and congratulated himself as being a most fortunate fellow, while Mary in tears—for she had truly loved her grandparent—prepared for her sad journey.

Upon reaching England and meeting with old Mr. Willing's lawyer, Roger's feelings can better be imagined than described, when he found that Mary's grandfather had died from the effects of her letter, telling of her unhappiness, but he had lived long enough to curse his nephew, and to add a codicil to his will, tying up everything so securely in Mary's favor, that Roger could never hope for a shilling of it, even in the event of his wife's death, for then it was to go to found a home for aged men, if she died without issue. Roger flew into a towering passion, and swore by all the gods that he would break the will, but he found that the old man



knew well what he was doing, and that now Mary was independent of him, and could leave him if she chose, but she did not choose. He was still her husband, for better or for worse. She had chosen her lot. She must abide by the choosing. Divorce was something unheard of in those days, and even if it had been, Mary had too high a sense of honor to have availed herself of so questionable a mode of becoming free from a distasteful marriage. She uncomplainingly bowed her shoulders to the burden placed upon them, and after all business connected with her grandfather's estates was settled, followed her husband on board an American vessel, and set sail for a new and untried land, to meet she knew not what.

As Roger neared his birthplace, he began to feel that pride in his possessions which is characteristic of us all to feel, no matter how humble may be the object which is our very own, and he pointed out to Mary with more real feeling in his manner than she had ever seen him manifest, the old house standing on the bluff, and as they entered the door he turned and kissed her, saying: "Welcome home, Mary. This is yours as well as mine," and the thought came to her, that perhaps from this time on, they might live happier, and learn to love again.

Roger anticipated a stormy scene with Bella, but he had always been master in his own house, and it would not take long, he felt sure, to convince her that discretion was the better part of valor, and that she must again become slave where she had reigned mistress. After removing their wraps, he began at once to show Mary the quaint house in which she must now make her home. Through long crooked passages ending in unexpected octagon rooms, or perhaps in a high-ceilinged picture-gallery, they wandered, laughing and chatting pleasantly, and Mary felt nearer to and more at ease with Roger, than at any time since that terrible night in Paris. The shadow seemed lifting, and she gaily placed her arm within that of her husband's, saying: "How delightful all this is, dear Roger. You have not told me half the beauties of this old place."

"There is one more room, Mary, which will delight you, I know. We call it the gable room. There is not another like it in the whole world. If you wish it, it



shall be yours. We can reach it best through my study. Come and I will show it you."

They passed through the study, and Roger opened a panel in the wall most cunningly concealed, and began to ascend the narrow spiral staircase. Mary followed close behind.

"There is a grand staircase leading from the other side," said Roger. "We will descend by that. He had reached the top, when suddenly with a stealthy spring, a beautiful creature barred his further progress. Was it a woman? For a moment Mary could hardly have told. She was held spell-bound, fascinated by the panther-like grace of the creature, who threw back her magnificent head, and at the same time raised a faultless arm, bare to the shoulder of any covering, except many and curiously-wrought bracelets. "Halt, Roger Willing!" she cried in the rich, peculiar voice of her race. "You cannot enter here, and bring that woman. These are my apartments. If you wish to see me, come alone."

Roger for a moment was startled, but quickly regaining his composure, he laughed lightly, saying: "Don't be a fool, Bella. This lady is my wife, and *your* mistress."

"Never!" cried Bella, passionately. Never will I acknowledge any person as my mistress. Give me my freedom papers as you promised to do, and I will go away; me and my child."

Roger laughed scornfully. "Your freedom papers, girl? Not I. Why, you have grown ten per cent. more valuable than you were a year ago. Your freedom papers! Well, I guess not, my beautiful tigress."

"Then may your death be on your own head," she said, solemnly, as she drew one hand from her pocket, and aimed a revolver at his breast. With my freedom papers I would have gone; without them, neither you or I shall live!"

Before Roger could draw back she had fired, and the aim had been sure and true. With a cry Roger placed his hand to his heart, and fell backward, down the stairs, at the feet of Mary, who stood too horrified to move or speak. Another shot rang out, and Bella, her beautiful face covered with her life's blood, fell across the threshold of the room she had so jealously guarded.

Mary covered her eyes from the awful sight, and



stood trembling beside the still form of her husband. She dared not move, and when she essayed to scream no sound issued from her parched lips. Her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth. A delicious sense of repose stole gradually over her, and as she sank upon her knees and rested her head on Roger's quiet body, she thought "This then is death. Thank God."

Not until the second supper-bell had sounded were they discovered. The living and the dead; and for many weeks after the sad tragedy, Mary's life was despaired of, but her fine English constitution carried her through her severe trial, and four months after Roger Willing was laid at rest, there came a pair of sturdy boys to comfort Mary, and they in time helped her to partly forget the heavy shadow resting upon her home. As the years passed the twins grew, and were the pride of Mary's heart, and also an ever-increasing care.

Roger the eldest by an hour was fair like Mary, with frank, fearless blue eyes, and flaxen curls. Andrew was swarthy skinned, dark browed, and had a somewhat forbidding countenance. Mary tried hard to show no partiality between them, but her heart would lean toward Roger, with his winning, courtly manner, and sunny disposition. Andrew saw it and rebelled, but not to his mother. His nature was too secretive to openly accuse her of having a fonder love for his twin brother, but every sweet endearing word, or tender look, bestowed upon Roger was carefully noted by Andrew, and pondered over in secret.

Mary carefully kept from them the manner of their father's death, until their twenty-first birthday, then, taking them to the study she showed them the unused door, cunningly concealed behind tapestries, and sliding it back, revealed the secret staircase which had never echoed to the sound of footsteps since that fatal day.

Mary stood between her stalwart sons, and with an arm about each, told them of the tragedy enacted there twenty-one years before, and warned them of their father's fate. She told them how, as soon as she was able, she had caused the front portion of the house leading to the gabled room to be walled up, and having changed her servants there was no one but herself who knew aught of the secret staircase leading from the study.



"Let us go up," said Roger eagerly, placing his foot on the stairs, but his mother stayed him by a gentle touch.

"No, my son, the dust of twenty-one years rests upon the cursed things above. It is my will that no one shall ever enter there. If I could have kept the knowledge of your father's fate from you, I would never have told you this, but I knew that sooner or later some evil tongue would whisper it to you, and I preferred to tell you the truth, although it has opened a wound that will never heal."

Roger placed an arm about her waist, and kissed her white hair. "Your wish shall be sacred to me, mother mine. Much as I long to explore the gable room, I shall never enter it except with your permission."

Andrew said nothing, but brushed a cobweb carelessly from the corner of the lower stair. A great black spider darted across his foot, another followed. Mary drew back, a startled look in her eyes. "Come away," she cried, "come away. Black spiders are evil omens. No good will come I fear, from my showing you this ill-fated staircase."

Andrew smiled and turned on his heel. "Superstition thy name is dear to woman. Where thou ledest she will follow," he said sneeringly.



## CHAPTER III.

SOME few weeks later Mary received a letter, and hastened to impart its contents to her sons. "We are to be honored, especially honored, with a visit from Lady Augusta Vale and her daughter," she said, with more animation than her sons had seen her display in years. "Augusta Champney was my dearest girl friend. In fact I had no other. We were inseparable. She was my maid of honor at my marriage, and was soon after married to Lord Arthur Vale, who died a few years ago leaving this daughter. I have always kept up a correspondence with Lady Vale, as you well know, having heard me speak of her many times. How gladly shall I welcome both mother and daughter, and if the dear child in any way resembles her mother as I remember her in her youthful beauty, then she is indeed most charming. Let me see, she must be about eighteen now."

Mary cast a thoughtful eye at Roger, who sat idly drumming on the table, and looking out of the window with rather a bored expression.

Andrew saw his mother's look and thought bitterly; "Her first thought is always of Roger. I know what's in her mind. She has already selected the English girl to be my brother's bride. Well he's welcome to her. The Virginia girls are good enough for me, but it makes my blood boil to see mother place Roger first in everything, and if I thought I could frustrate her plans I would cut Roger out as soon as I saw any signs of his beginning to make love. I could do it, too."

Roger suddenly stopped drumming on the table, and turned toward Mary. "How long will these grand people stay, mother mine?"

"I'm sure I don't know, dear. Nothing definite is said in this letter. I shall not care if they never go away."

"Whew! I think I'll vacate," exclaimed Roger, laughingly. "You won't want a great lumbering fellow like me around after *they* get here. I've been wanting



to go to New York for ever so long. Now is my chance."

"Roger, you would never be so ungallant as to run away just at the very time when I need you most. Why I depend upon *you* to be our cavalier. What should I do?"

"Oh, Andy would pull you through all right. He can make himself twice as agreeable to the ladies as I can. He'll have the English daisy dead in love with him in less than a month. Hey, old fellow?"

Roger rose and slapped Andrew heartily upon the back, whose brow clouded still darker as he watched his brother's smiling face. "I'll go off, also," he said, gloomily. "Mother won't want *me* around. She never does."

"Don't say that, my son," replied Mary, warmly. "Why should I not want you? Are you not my own boy, and as dear to me as Roger? You will both stay here, I know, and help me to entertain my friends. Roger spoke a moment ago of their being grand people. Lady Augusta will be greatly changed from what I knew her, if she has even a spark of haughtiness. She is simple, and free from anything approaching the English pride of birth, which mar the otherwise lovely characters of the ladies of England. I am sure she is too wise and thoughtful to rear her daughter in any other but the true way, so we may expect to receive and welcome two ladies who are not 'grand,' as Roger is pleased to style them, but who will be as ourselves. Lady Vale could boast of her high lineage if she chose, for there is no bluer blood in all England, but she is not one to make a show, or parade her ancestors. I am sure you will never hear her speak of it boastingly. She has not much of a fortune left, I believe. Just enough to make her comfortable."

Mary ended her little speech with a look of entreaty toward Roger, which said plainly: "You are my dear son. There is none other in the whole world like you. Stay and lay siege to this maiden's heart, and give me a daughter." Roger interpreted the look, and arose with a shrug of his shoulders, and left the room. His mother's manner was marked, and therefore man-like, he muleishly determined that no one should arrange *his* love affairs for *him*, and that if his mother for a moment imagined such a thing, he would very shortly undeceive



her. Accordingly, a few days before the visitors were expected, he appeared at his mother's private room, attired for traveling. "I'm off for New York, mother mine," he said, kissing her cheek. "Dont' know how long I shall be gone."

Mary arose and threw her arms around his neck. "This is not treating me fairly, my son. I know you are going on account of my guests who are coming. Why do you object so strongly to meeting with them?"

"Home won't seem the same after they get here," replied Roger, brushing the soft hair from his mother's brow. "Andy will take good care of Lady Vale and her daughter, and I'll promise not to be gone longer than they stay. Write me when they are leaving, and you'll see me here in a jiffy."

Mary watched him depart with a tearful face. His long, swinging strides soon took him from her view, and she sank into a seat, burying her face in her hands. Until now she had not fully realized how much she had reckoned on Roger's falling in love with the daughter of her old friend. He was heart-free she well knew, never having cared especially for any one lady, and she had really set her heart upon a marriage between her favorite son and this girl who she imagined must be just the wife for him. Now her plans were all dashed to the ground, and by her own foolishness, too. If she had not mentioned their coming, but had taken Roger by surprise, all might have been well.

She dashed the tears away, and went out to find Andrew, whom she told of his brother's departure. Andrew was not ill-pleased at the course Roger had taken. He had not much of an idea of laying siege to Miss Vale's heart, still he was not unconscious of his brother's superiority in many ways, and he thought to himself that so long as the ladies stayed, it was as well for Roger to be absent, and very thoughtful of him to take himself out of the way.

Soon after this the ladies came. Lady Vale, tall, statuesque, with snow white hair, and a beautiful face despite her years, and her daughter, so much like the mother, barring the beautiful bronze hair, and laughing grey eyes in which, as yet, there was no shadow of a sorrow. Both had the same sweet, serious mouth, charming when in repose, but most enchanting when parted



with a smile, which was often the case with Victoria Vale. Her's was a sunny nature, and Mary took her to her heart at once. In less than a week they had grown to be inseparable companions, and Lady Vale often laughingly remarked, that she was beginning to feel the pangs of jealousy for the first time in her life.

"If God had only blessed me with a daughter like you," sighed Mary as she was strolling with her young companion. "It has ever been a sorrow to me that one of my sons was not a daughter."

"Surely you do not love either of your sons less, just because he is a boy?" asked Victoria quickly.

"No-o," said Mary, hesitatingly, "yet I would rather Andrew had been a girl."

"She loves the absent one more dearly," mused Victoria, looking at Mary's speaking face. "Will you tell me about the son who is not here?" she asked, drawing Mary to a rustic seat and placing an arm about her.

"With pleasure, my love. You have seen his portrait, but that is cold, inanimate. It does not, cannot give you his winning charm of manner, his laughing voice, so full of hearty cheer. I miss him sadly, Victoria. He is a part of myself. We have never been separated so long before. The boys have often taken trips with their tutor while being educated, but never of very long duration, unless I went also. I long for his merry voice, always gay. I long to hear him say, 'I am here, mother, mine.'"

"Why do you not send for him, Mrs. Willing? I am sure he will gladly return if he knows how you long for him."

Mary gazed at the unconscious face of the beautiful girl. Dare she tell her what was in her mind? Dare she awaken thoughts which, until now, she was sure Victoria knew nothing of? Yes, she would. Her mother-love for the absent made her scent approaching danger, and she had noticed Andrew's growing interest in her fair guest. She would speak. There could be no great harm in that. She took Victoria's hand, and pressed it gently, while she looked directly into the sweet grey eyes.

"Roger is shy where ladies are, except, of course, his old mother. I fear he ran away to avoid you."



A faint, pink flush covered Victoria's face, and neck, and she quickly drew her hand from Mary's."

"I am sorry," she said, simply. "My mother and I will proceed on our travels to-morrow."

"No, no, dear child," cried Mary, in alarm. "You misunderstand me. Do not think for a moment that you are keeping Roger from his home. He—he—oh, how can I tell you, my sweet girl, for fear you may think my words designing ones, and still you should know me better. I would sooner die than cause you sorrow, or make you afraid of me."

Victoria kissed Mary, and said gently: "Dear Mrs. Willing, I could never suspect you to be anything but good, true, and full of zealous care for my well-being. Next to dear mamma I love and adore you. Then what is this that agitates you so? Will you not tell me?"

"Yes, I will tell you, Victoria. Roger has gone away because—because he loves you."

"Loves me!" cried the girl, rising and confusedly placing her hands to her head. "Ah, no, dear madam. You are mistaken. He has never seen me."

"Ah, my dear, he does not need to see you. Love is not born with the sight. It is of the spirit. We have talked of you so much. He has dwelt upon your image, until he is already acquainted with you, and he has flown from you, abashed at his own boldness in daring to love one so far above him."

Victoria buried her blushing face in her hands, and Mary gently drew the beautiful head to her bosom. "Do not be alarmed, dear one. He is not coming back to disturb your peace. He will never tell you of his love, so now forget that I have spoken, or that such a being as Roger Willing lives. I cannot part with you; your mother has not a warmer affection for you than I. Then why not remain here in America, making short trips to different points of interest, but always making this your abiding place."

Artful Mary. If she had studied the rules of diplomacy all her life, she could not have taken a surer way of arousing Victoria's interest in the absent Roger, than by talking as she had done.

Many times for weeks after, Victoria caught herself blushing at what Mary had told her. There is no young girl if told that a man whom she has never seen, and



who has never seen her, is madly in love with her, but what will often allow her thoughts to wander to the absent one. "Poor fellow," she thinks, "I am heartily sorry for him, but of course he did the best thing for himself by going away. I should never have fancied him, and it would have been dreadful to have had him in the same house with me." Some such thoughts as these often ran through Victoria's mind, and she would have been thoroughly surprised at herself if anybody had taken her to task as to how many times a day Roger's name was on her tongue, or in her mind. She would have blushed to answer. Yes, indeed. Artful Mary.

At first Andrew met Victoria only at meal times, and in the drawing-room after dinner, and to his mother's queries as to how he liked her, he answered that he "never did fancy red heads and owls' eyes," much to Mary's secret satisfaction, but it was not long ere Andrew sought Victoria in her favorite haunts about the grounds, and if he saw her start out for a ramble or canter he was not slow in following her. Victoria did not dislike his attentions. His dark melancholy beauty was extremely fascinating, and Andrew had a manner if he chose to exercise it, that few women could resist. And in a very few weeks he threw all the fascinations of which he was master around the unconscious Victoria. Mesmerism was a subject just being agitated at that time, and Andrew was deeply interested in it. He believed Victoria to be of a yielding, pliant nature, and one easily influenced by magnetism. If they were sitting at the table he would fix his eyes upon her, and presently her eyelids would gently tremble, and then she would raise her eyes like a frightened fawn to his, and he would turn away with a satisfied smile. Again, he would be sitting upon the veranda as she passed out. He would follow her with his eyes, willing her to go so far and no further. She would stop, hesitate, turn back, and again ascend the steps, and seat herself beside him. All this pleased him, and he felt sure of being able to will her to do his bidding at any time when he saw fit. At first he was only interested in her, and had no thought of love or marriage, but as the weeks went by, he felt a longing for her presence when she was absent, and the mere sound of her voice in greeting, sent a



thrill through him, which told him that if he did not already love, he was near to the brink.

As for Victoria, she was totally ignorant of any feeling, except friendship, for Andrew Willing, unless it might be a vague uneasiness when in his presence, for which she was unable to account. She knew that she breathed easier when away from him, and that very often she accompanied him on drives and boating, when she did not care to go, but felt some unseen power almost compelling her to do that which was against her will. She often raised her eyes to find his fixed upon her with a strange light in their depths, which made a chill go through her, and at times when she felt this unaccountable feeling, she would steal into the picture-gallery, and gaze long and earnestly at Roger's quiet, peaceful face. It rested her, she knew not why, and she always went out feeling calmer, and more like her old self ere any disturbing element had come into her life.

Lady Vale did not see this little drama being enacted under her eyes, or she might have taken her daughter away, for she had conceived a dislike for Andrew, unaccountable even to herself; but Mary's eyes were open, and she looked on with fear and trembling. Oh, if Roger would only return before the mischief had gone too far. She would write a pleading letter, taking care not to mention the name of Vale, and perhaps he might come home. So the letter was sent, and very shortly the answer came. Roger was enjoying himself hugely, and had no desire to return until the English visitors had departed.

"Well," thought Mary, "if the mountain will not come to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountain. I will propose that we all take a trip, and it will be strange if I cannot bring them together before the journey is ended. I am satisfied what the result will be, once they see each other. My boy cannot help loving her, and she will likewise be drawn to him."

Mary was not long in broaching the subject of travel to Lady Vale, who acquiesced immediately; and inside of a week, the house was left to the care of servants, and the four people had started for Canada.

Andrew was delighted with the arrangement, for he anticipated much pleasure journeying with the girl he loved, for he now acknowledged to himself that he was



madly in love with the sweet fair English maiden, whose smile was heaven to him, and for whom if need be he would gladly die. He longed to breathe his passion but he dared not. Something in the serene, unconscious face restrained him, and he felt that he could afford to wait. He seemingly had things all his own way. He saw how his mesmeric power controlled her, and he felt no fear but that when the proper time came, she could no more resist him than the charmed bird can resist the pitiless eyes of the snake. He knew that she had not a spark of regard for him, but that would matter little when the time should come to act. His was the stronger will; he would compel her to yield to his love, then it would be an easy and most pleasant task to teach her to love him.



## CHAPTER IV.

THEY had been travelling for nearly two months, visiting the mountains and the different lakes, and Mary was beginning to think about getting toward New York and Roger, when without any warning came a telegram, announcing a fatal explosion which had resulted in the probable loss of both eyes to Roger. He was in a hospital and wanted his mother. Mary lost no time in going to him taking Andrew with her, and leaving Lady Vale and her daughter to return to the "Five Gables," and make everything comfortable for the invalid's reception, for Mary determined on taking Roger home as soon as permissable.

In the hurried preparation for departure, Andrew saw no way in which to broach the subject of his love for Victoria. He doubted if she would listen kindly when so agitated by his mother's keen distress, so he bade the girl who had become so dear to him, a calm good-bye, and left her with a strange sinking at the heart, which he knew was not caused by the news of his brother's accident, but by a presentiment of something about to befall Victoria.

Lady Vale and Victoria hurried back to Mary's home, and there waited in sorrow for the home-coming of one whom they knew to be his mother's idol. Mary had written that there was "no hope that Roger would ever see again, but they dare not tell him just yet. Let him fully recover from the shock to his nervous system."

Lady Vale's eyes filled with tears as she read the letter, which showed plainly a mother's buried hopes. "Poor Mary," she said as she handed the letter to Victoria. "The sun of her world has gone down never to rise again. Her hopes have all been centered in that boy. She seemed to care but little for Andrew. It was all Roger, Roger with her. How will she bear this heavy cross?"

Victoria took the letter, and stole up to the picture gallery, and stood before Roger's smiling, winsome face. "Could it be possible that the light of those laughing



eyes had gone out forever? Ah no. God was good. He would restore to Roger his sight," she felt sure.

They arrived at evening when everything was hushed and still, and a quiet peaceful calm rested on the home nest. Victoria watched the carriage being driven up to the door, then she fled to her room. She could not meet him yet. Not till the sorrow of being in his childhood's home, which his eyes never more would gaze upon, had lost its first bitterness. She had seen Mary descend from the carriage weeping, and had seen Andrew assist a blindfolded figure tenderly out, and she realized that she had no part in their grief; that she was only a stranger, and a vague longing took possession of her—a longing to be nearer the stricken one; a wish to take a sister's part in nursing him back to health and strength.

In a few moments, she went down, but not into the family sitting-room. She took a light wrap from the rack in the hall, and passed quietly out into the fast gathering twilight; but the quick eye of Andrew had seen her form pass the open door, and he followed her, glad of the chance to see her alone. She turned as she heard his step, and although the darkness partly concealed his face, she noticed the glad ring in his voice as he came quickly up to her, and took both her hands in his. "Victoria, sweet one, are you glad that I am back? Did you miss me? Oh how your pure face maddens me," and before she had realized what he was about to do, he had caught her to him, and had pressed a burning kiss upon her lips.

Victoria struggled to free herself, but she failed, and indignantly looked up into the face of her captor. His eyes shone with a strange light. She felt a dreamy languor stealing upon her, a desire to sleep. What did it mean? Had this man a power over her which she was unable to resist? Horrible thought. She made one more feeble attempt to get away, and then lay passive and and quiet in his arms.

He looked gloatingly down at his helpless burden. "I have conquered," he whispered hoarsely. "She cannot fly from me now. She is mine. Victoria, my sweet angel?"

"Yes," she answered faintly.

"Put your arms about my neck and kiss me."



She slowly did as he bade her, but there was no expression in the white face pressed to his, no passion in the kiss. Only a passive obedience to his will, which shamed him, hardened though he was, and he felt no pleasure in the caress which he had been obliged to gain by force. He gently drew her to a rustic seat, and fanned her with his hat. In a few moments she breathed a low sigh and looked up into his face; then she started to her feet and would have fled if he had not caught her arm and held her.

"Let me go," she cried. "You hurt me."

"Victoria, be seated for a moment until I can explain," he said pleadingly. "I have not meant to be harsh with you. Any culprit has a right to plead his cause and ask for mercy. Then will you hear me?"

"I will hear you," she answered coldly, "but I prefer to stand."

"That means that you have no confidence in me," he retorted bitterly. "You are safe from my touch, Victoria. I shall never lay hands on you again without your permission. I did not mean to frighten you, I had no intention of doing as I did. I was a brute. Will you forgive me?"

"No," she answered indignantly.

His lips parted in a dangerous smile. "You will not forgive me this slight offense. Then if I am in disgrace with you I might as well tell you all. I love you! Stay, Victoria," as she turned toward the house. "You *shall* hear me. I adore you! Life will not be worth living if you do not share it with me. I want you for my wife, and I mean to have you. Yes," as she scornfully tossed her head. "As surely as this moon shines in the sky above us, just as surely will I win you for my wife. You do not think so now; you say in your mind, 'I hate him,' but the time will come when you shall humbly place your arms about my neck, and say of your own free will, 'I love you; I am yours.'"

If Victoria had been a girl of the period she might have returned a saucy and spirited answer, but being a young lady carefully reared by an English mamma, and living long before slang was invented, she simply said: "Are you done, Mr. Willing?"

"Yes, I am done, Lady Victoria Vale."

"Thank you for placing me on my guard. I shall



know how to meet you from this time on," and with these words she turned and left him."

Andrew sat for some time in deep thought. He was not disheartened at the turn affairs had taken. He knew his power and meant to use it, but in a more temperate way than he had begun. He must be careful and not frighten the bird away, or all would be lost. So long as she staid under the same roof with him, he was confident of success.

Victoria made one great mistake. She did not tell her mother. At first she felt ashamed, humiliated, and dared not confide in her best friend. She knew that her mother would immediately start for England, and she did not want to go. She loved Mary dearly, and now here was Roger afflicted sorely, and she had promised Mary to be his eyes for a while at any rate. Then why should she allow her hatred of Andrew to drive her away from duty, and why should she tell her mother of a disagreeable episode which would never occur again. It would only disturb her, so Victoria met Andrew at breakfast the next morning with a serene countenance, and the two elder ladies dreamed not of the tempest in the two young hearts.

Roger did not appear at breakfast. He was still very much fatigued from his journey, and dreading to meet strangers with this affliction still new upon him, he breakfasted in his own rooms, which Mary had made the brightest and most cheerful looking in the house, even if her darling could not see them. She hastily drank a cup of coffee, then begging to be excused, saying "Roger would feel lonely if left too long," she went out, leaving Lady Vale with Victoria to entertain Andrew.

Victoria looked after Mary with wistful eyes. How she longed to accompany her, and beg to be allowed to minister to the invalid's many wants.

Lady Vale glanced rather anxiously at Victoria's pale face and drooping eyes. "Are you not well, my love?" she asked.

Victoria started, and a faint rose color supplanted the lily in her cheeks. "I was not aware of feeling other than in the best of health, dear mamma. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, I thought your general expression savored of lassitude; lacked vivacity, as it were. No doubt the de-



pressingly warm weather has something to do with it. Now that Mary is again at home and does not need us, would you like to visit some of the lakes, or perhaps the mountains?"

Andrew listened almost breathlessly for Victoria's reply. He expected to hear a quick assent to Lady Vale's proposition. After his rough conduct of last night Victoria would gladly make her escape from his hateful presence. He could hardly conceal a smile of delight as Victoria laughed lightly, and said: "Ah, mamma, what did I tell you the other day? Did I not say that you were sadly in need of spectacles? That your eyesight was rapidly failing you? And this proves it. To think that you should imagine I was losing my health. I never felt better in my life. I do not care to travel. What more enchanting spot can we find than this? I never tire of its beauties, besides I promised dear Mrs. Willing to lighten her labor of love, by assisting her in reading to, and caring for, the invalid. Would it be courtesy on our part to leave her just at the time when she needs us most?"

"Certainly not, my daughter. If such be the case, we will stay by all means. I only spoke of going away because I felt concerned as to your health."

"Then let your heart be reassured, dear mamma," answered Victoria, rising and kissing Lady Vale. "I feel more than usually bright this morning. Will you walk with me down by the lake? We have still a few more lines of Virgil to translate."

"With pleasure, my love. Will you not accompany us, Andrew?"

Andrew hesitated, and was about to assent, when a warning flash from Victoria's eyes stayed him. It plainly said "Do not inflict your presence any longer upon me, sir. I shall rebel."

"I am extremely sorry, Lady Vale, but I have sadly neglected my duties in being away from home caring for Roger. I must now go over the different plantations, and start immediately, so adieu for to-day and possibly for several days. I may find much to detain me." He bowed courteously to Victoria, gallantly kissed Lady Vale's hand, and left the room.

Victoria's heart gave a bound of relief. "Now I shall be my old self again," she thought. Relieved of his



odious watchful eyes following me everywhere, I can again be natural. Ugh! I feel as if a snake had crawled over me, and left its nasty trail behind."

She gave her arm to Lady Vale. "Come mamma, let us get out into the beautiful sunlight, among the fragrant blooming trees. I feel stifled here."

They had been down by the lake over an hour. Lady Vale with her white hands idly resting in her lap, was watching two swans which were sailing majestically on the placid bosom of the water, while she listened to the sweet voice of Victoria, reading the closing lines of Virgil. Suddenly she looked toward the avenue, and placed her hand on Victoria's arm. "Hush, daughter, I heard voices. Ah, I thought I was not mistaken. It is Mary leading her son. Is not that a touching sight? Who could look upon it without being affected. The mother, her hair whitened with years, bending her form under the weight of her stalwart youthful son upon whom she has centered all her hopes."

Victoria raised her head, and her eyes filled with tears. Roger's head was bent until his lips touched his mother's hair. They were still too far away for her to distinguish what they were saying.

"How does the dear old place look, mother mine? Is it changed?"

"Not at all, dear Roger. The peacocks are strutting on the lawn. The swans are sailing on the lake, and, oh my darling, the fairest girl who ever lived is sitting on the stone seat which you fashioned with your own hands when but a lad. You ran away from her, but fate, or a kind Providence which ever you will, has decreed that you are to meet. You are not averse to it, my son?"

"Not now, mother. I can be nothing but an object of pity to her, and as for me, all interest in anything feminine has ceased forever."

Victoria rose and advanced to meet them.

"Oh, if you could only see her now," exclaimed Mary. "She is tall and most beautifully formed. Her complexion is like roses; her eyes like stars; but they are filled with tears, my son; and those tears are for you; and the expression on her sweet face is such, that if you could but see it, you would take her in your arms and kiss the tears away. It is not pity. It is love; maidenly love, which as yet does not know that it loves."



Victoria was near enough now to hear Roger say: "Mother, you speak wildly. What do you mean?" and she wondered what Mary had been saying.

"Ah, Victoria, I missed you, and wondered where you had hidden. Roger, this is Lady Victoria Vale, of whom you have often heard me speak."

Roger pressed the little hand placed within his, and smiled. Victoria thought she had never seen a more winning smile, yet it was full of sadness.

"Yes, I ought to know Lady Victoria Vale very well," he said, still retaining her hand; "but I should like to have met her under brighter circumstances." He lightly touched the bandage about his eyes. "If I could but tear off this hateful band, and be able to see the beautiful vision which my mother is never tired of praising! But that pleasure is denied me. I must be content to see only with *her* eyes."

Victoria blushed and withdrew her hand.

"Dear Mrs. Willing is partial, and I am afraid sees only with the eyes of love. She says she loves me as she would a daughter, so you must excuse any little exaggerations on her part."

Mary had gone on and left the young people together, while she spoke with Lady Vale. "Come," continued Victoria, "let me introduce you to my mother. Shall I become your guide? Your mother has basely deserted you."

"Hail to her desertion," laughed Roger as he felt Victoria's arm slip into his. "This is a lucky exchange of companions for me. Are you not taller than my mother?"

"Somewhat," replied Victoria, leading him to her mother who rose and grasped both his hands, kissing him tenderly.

"Ah! this is indeed a greeting worth having," cried Roger. "See what it is to be an invalid. I doubt if you would have accorded me this honor, had I been presented to you six months ago, Lady Vale."

"Who knows," replied Lady Vale, who saw that Roger chose to make light of his affliction, and did not wish too much sympathy expressed. "I am glad that I am not a young lady. I am afraid I should lose my heart. You are too dangerous as it is. No wonder your mother's life is all centered in you."



Roger's laugh rang out joyously, and Mary smiled to see him in such good spirits.

"Ah, Lady Vale, it is very plain to be seen that you have visited Ireland, and kissed the 'Blarney Stone,'" said Roger.

Lady Vale placed her hand on the young man's arm. "My dear boy," she said gravely, "I love your mother as I would a sister. I love her sons because they are her sons. I have mourned with her over this affliction which has come upon you, until you have become very near to me. There has been no flattery meant in the few words I have spoken."

Roger grasped the white hand still lying on his arm, and carried it to his lips, while his voice had a suspicious tremble in it as he said, "I never longed for my sight as I do at this moment. My mother has undertaken to describe you, but I am sure her description must fall far short of the reality. How is it that I am blessed with so charming a trio to minister to my comfort, and to help to chase dull care away? I have been anything but a docile invalid, have I not, mother mine?"

"You have been most patient, my son. Indeed, I have wondered how you could bear all that you have with such rare fortitude, but sit down on this rustic seat made by yourself, and rest. I am sure Victoria will most gladly take upon herself the task of entertaining you, while Lady Vale accompanies me to the gardener's cottage. I must see him before luncheon."

Roger smiled as his mother gently pressed him into the old stone seat, and walked away with Lady Vale. Victoria stood a short distance from him, looking out over the lake, and thinking: "What shall I say to him? I must be cheerful while I feel just like crying, and I can't think of a pleasant word to say. I wish I had a good book. One never need to exert themselves when they can read something interesting. I will ask him who is his favorite author, then step up to the house and select it."

"Am I deserted?" said Roger, putting out his hand gropingly. "I thought I heard my mother say that Lady Victoria Vale would stay by me."

"I am here," replied Victoria, moving nearer. Roger touched her dress.

"There used to be room enough for two on this



stone. It has not changed, I think. Will you not sit beside me? I like to have people near while I talk to them."

Victoria complied, blushing slightly, as there was scant room for two, and necessitated the placing of Roger's arm over the back of the seat.

"How ridiculous of me to blush," she thought, "he can't see me."

"Now tell me how you like our home, Lady Victoria. Is it not the fairest spot you have ever seen?"

"It is very beautiful, Mr. Willing, but I know one fairer, and more dear to me."

"Ah! I can guess without further explanation from you. It is your English home. Let me see, what is the name of it? I have heard my mother say."

"Valecourt, Mr. Willing. Oh, it is so beautiful. I wish you might see it." She stopped in confusion, as a pained expression rested for a moment upon Roger's face. "Oh, what *have* I said, pray forgive me, Mr. Willing. I am such a blunderer. I had forgotten your affliction."

"Don't make any excuses," replied Roger, trying to laugh cheerfully. "You were wishing I might see your home so far away. What is to hinder me? I will see it now by proxy. You shall describe it so graphically that I shall need no eyes, and perhaps, who knows, in the years to come I may gaze upon its beauties. I shall not always be blind."

Victoria gazed at the young man pityingly. She knew how hopeless was his case by Mary's despairing letters. "Would it not be better if he knew?" she thought. "Would it not be more charitable to tell him the truth?" She would consult Mrs. Willing.

Roger continued. "I will forgive you on one condition. That you drop the formal Mr. Willing, and call me Roger. No one calls me Mr. Willing, except strangers, and you are not a stranger. You are my cousin. Your mother said as much. She said she was my mother's sister. I'll tell you what we will do. I hate the handle to your name. I am too thoroughly American to enjoy titles, although my parents were of English blood. I'll call you Cousin Victoria, while to you I am Cousin Roger."



"Agreed," said Victoria, laughing. "I never did like those near to me to call me Lady Victoria. It places me miles away from them."

Roger felt a strange thrill in the region of his heart as Victoria said "those near to me." Then he was one of the fortunate "those." How soon would it be ere he could dispense with the hateful bandage, and look upon the face of the sweet-voiced maiden, who so unconsciously said such comforting things?

"Let us begin without delay, then, Cousin Victoria; tell me of your fair English home, Valecourt."

While Victoria pictured her home to Roger, Lady Vale and Mary walked slowly toward the gardener's cottage arm in arm.

"You have guessed my hopes, dear Augusta, or I should say, what was once my hope, in regard to your child and my Roger."

"Yes, Mary," and Lady Vale pressed her friend's hand tenderly. "Shattered hopes. I will say that I should not have been averse to their union, had Roger been in full possession of his health, but now—dear Mary, *you* surely cannot wish it, while of course Victoria will not allow herself to love a blind man. Think of what a future hers would be, tied for life to a never ceasing care. Ah no, it can never, never be."

Mary burst into tears. "My poor boy! What a dark prospect lies before him. I must tell him the physician's decision, though the telling break my heart."

"Has he enough strength of will, think you, to bear up under it? When he knows there is no hope, will he do as so many have done before him? Will he take his own life?"

"God forbid! Oh Augusta, you are a mother; pity a sorrowing mother's breaking heart, and promise me, that if God brings those two young hearts together, and they love, in spite of Roger's affliction, promise me that you will consent to their union; that you will do nothing to separate them?"

Mary stopped and wound her arms around Lady Vale, who kissed the tear-stained face of her friend. "It is a hard thing to promise, dear Mary."

"Ah! but my heart will break if you do not. Think of how little Roger will have to make him happy. Think



of what a joy such a love as Victoria's would be to him. They may not love, but if they do, will you promise me not to withhold your consent? Do Augusta, or my life will be miserable." And Lady Vale, although her heart misgave her, finally consented, hoping that Victoria's good sense would prevent her from doing anything so rash.



## CHAPTER V.

ANDREW remained away three days. They seemed the longest three days in all his life. He longed to be near Victoria, to hear her voice, to watch her changing face, even if she did show weariness at his presence, and treat him with scorn. His perseverance must win in the long run, and then how sweet the victory. He doubted if he would have loved her with half the fervor, if she had willingly thrown herself into his arms, but her scornful half-averted looks, only made the blood course faster through his veins, and the chase was twice as fascinating. As he rode up the broad avenue that quiet summer evening, he was as positive of victory, as though Victoria were already his wife, and he anticipated the swift look of disdain which would shoot from her eyes, with as much ardor as a favored lover longs for his mistress's most enchanting smile. To his enamored fancy her coldness was only a sure sign of a complete conquest for him. As he drew near the house he heard voices, and then a laugh which he knew could only belong to one person, Victoria. The happy, joyous ring of her voice told that she was enjoying her companion's society. Andrew wondered who it could be. A pang of jealousy shot through him, as he descried a tall, manly form with his arm passed through Victoria's, slowly pacing in front of him. "Ah!" he thought, "so we have a visitor. Very familiar, I must say. I'll soon put an end to that." He savagely thrust his spurs into the animal's sides, causing the poor creature to rear and plunge madly, while Victoria who had not heard Andrew approaching, screamed and jumped to one side, dragging Roger with her, as the horse dashed by. Andrew wheeled and returned, glancing quickly at Victoria's companion, and when he saw the blind-folded figure of his brother, he uttered an exclamation which sounded very much like "damn." He had forgotten Roger, or if he had thought of him, it was of his being in a darkened room shut away from everything joyous, and bemoaning his fate. Instead, Andrew saw him apparently happy,



with a jest on his lips, entertaining his fair guide in a manner peculiarly Roger's own, and "evidently very pleasing to Victoria," Andrew thought bitterly, for *he* had never been able to beguile such laughter from those sweet lips. In another moment he was smiling at his foolishness, at being for even a second jealous of a blind man. "Of course she is doing her best to cheer him," he thought. "Poor Roger. Why should I begrudge him a few moments of happiness? It's all he'll ever get, I fancy."

He alighted and grasped Roger by the hand. "Hello, old chap," he said heartily. "I'm glad to see you out, and more like your old self than when I went away. How are the eyes progressing?" To Victoria he merely raised his hat, who acknowledged his salutation by a silent bow.

"Hello, yourself," cried Roger, taking his arm from Victoria's. "I'm right glad to see you back again, Andrew. My eyes are doing fine, thank you. I think it nonsense to keep all this fol-de-rol around them. I'm sure they would get well much quicker without the bandage. I fancied I could see a ray of light this morning, as Richard dressed them."

Andrew started, and glanced toward Victoria, but she stood a little apart, with her eyes on the ground, and as he slipped his horse's bridle over one arm, he offered the other to Roger, saying: "Come, brother, let me perform the pleasant duty of guiding you, although I may not be so apt as your fair companion. I hope it will not be long now that any one shall have to be eyes for you." While in his heart he was saying: "Can it be possible that the doctor was wrong in saying that his eyesight was totally destroyed? Doctors make mistakes sometimes, as well as other people. Well, if such be the case my goose will be cooked; I can see that with half an eye. Victoria would never look at me twice, after gazing into the laughing eyes of Roger, for he is far superior to me, and I know it. Well, may the best fellow win. I can hold my own with a man without eyes, but, ah yes, there is a but in every case, I reckon, and if Roger regains the sight of those melting orbs, good-bye, Andrew Willing, and exaunt from the scene."

He followed his mother from the dining-room after



their evening meal, and when they were alone, he said: "Is there any hope of Roger regaining his sight?"

"None whatever, Andrew."

"But he told me he fancied he could see a ray of light this morning, when his attendant was dressing his eyes."

Mrs. Willing began to weep. "Poor boy, he fancies that every day; perhaps he can distinguish light from darkness, but what is that? I had a letter from Dr. Kohler last night. He is coming—as he promised to do—when it is time to remove the bandage. Then he will break the news to Roger. It is better that he should hear it from a stranger."

Andrew went out from his mother's presence with almost rejoicing in his heart. He knew he ought to mourn with her at this affliction which had come upon his twin brother, but instead, he felt a wicked satisfaction in knowing that Roger would be shorn of his greatest strength as long as he lived. The care of the plantation, all money matters which had once been Roger's prerogative, would now revert to the younger brother; younger by one short hour, but who had been made to feel all his life, that Roger was his superior in everything, and now,—now that a new love had sprung up in his heart, and for a moment, a fierce jealousy as well, he knew that if Roger by any chance should regain his eyesight, he should hate him with bitterer hatred than ever Cain displayed toward *his* brother. All else he might relinquish in Roger's favor, but Victoria never.

For several days he watched the pair with Argus eyes. Not a motion made by either escaped him. Victoria was soon conscious of his espionage, and became guarded in her actions, never betraying by word or look the deep interest she felt in Roger, so that Andrew finally concluded, that Roger was fast falling in love with Victoria, but that *she* cared nothing for the blind man, nor would she ever. He soon tried his power over Victoria, and to his delight found it as strong as ever. One day he was sitting in the little rustic summer-house, when he saw her going down the avenue toward the lodge gates. He never took his eyes off of her figure, but slowly put out both hands toward her. Presently she turned, and came rapidly back directing her steps to where he was sitting. There were two doors to the summer-house, and as she approached, he quietly slipped out behind an acacia



bush, taking care not to turn his back to her, keeping his eyes fixed steadily upon her. She entered by the opposite door and sat down, with a vacant expression in her eyes, languidly leaning her head against the lattice work. A few seconds passed, and Andrew stole out from behind the bush, and seated himself beside her, taking her passive hand in his, and patting it gently.

"Are you happy, Victoria," he whispered.

"Oh, so happy," she answered dreamily.

"Do you love?"

"Ah yes," with a sigh, "I love."

He passed his hand over her face and her eyes closed.

"Do you love me, Victoria darling?"

"Yes, I love you."

"Then kiss me. Kiss my hands, my hair, my face!"

Victoria complied, and different to that other time when he had forced her, there was now a passionate abandonment in her caresses, which caused the blood to course through his veins like fire, and he caught her to his breast, pressing his face to the one not whiter than his own.

"God in heaven, how I love her!" he cried. A moment later he was again behind the bush, and Victoria slowly opened her eyes, yawned, and looked about her, bewildered. "Strange," she said dreamily, "very strange. How came I here? I started for the lodge. Oh, I know. I felt so sort of weak and trembling, that I decided to rest for a moment. I must have dropped asleep." She arose and passed out.

As soon as she had disappeared, Andrew entered the summer-house, flung himself down on the seat so lately occupied by Victoria, and remained buried in thought for some time. He dared not try his power too often, and only then when he was safe from detection. He knew that if Victoria's suspicions should be again aroused, she would flee from the house, and he would lose her forever; so when in her presence he was most circumspect, and veiled his eyes when he knew they betrayed too dangerous a fire."

Meanwhile Roger's eyes had ceased to pain him, and he chafed at having to still wear the bandage. One day his ill-humor and impatience got the upper hand of him, and he took Victoria by surprise by suddenly tearing the bandage from his face. She had been reading



Ivanhoe to him. They were out in their favorite stone seat by the lake. A quick gesture caused her to glance up, and she uttered a faint cry, for she saw him for the first time without the disfiguring cloth.

"Oh, Cousin Roger! What made you?" she cried. "You must let me bandage your eyes again."

"Never," he replied, catching her hand as he felt it touch his face. I have waited for that confounded doctor to come till I'm tired. My eyes must get accustomed to the light or I'll never see, and Victoria, I have heard your voice, your laugh, have felt your presence until I am wild to see your face. He groped for her face, and took it between his hands, drawing it close until it nearly touched his own.

"Can you see me?" she asked eagerly. He sadly dropped his hands.

"No, Victoria. I cannot see even an object. Oh, God! the thought that perhaps I may be totally blind is maddening. Victoria!" His voice as he spoke her name ran the whole gamut of love, hope, despair, misery.

Victoria quickly placed her hand upon his. "What is it, dear Roger?"

"Victoria, I cannot live if I am blind. When the doctor comes, if he tells me there is no hope, I shall end my useless life—there." He pointed toward the lake.

"Oh, no, no, Roger! How can you think of anything so horrible? Have you no love for your mother who adores you, that you should grieve her so?"

"I shall soon be forgotten, Victoria. Better to die and end it all than to live a burden, and no comfort to anybody. Ah, Victoria, you do not know what hopes I have cherished. What visions I have seen. God grant they may be realized." He grasped the hand which still lingered on his arm. "My angel of peace, my comforter, my eyes, it is a cruel question I am going to ask you. Could you sacrifice your youth, your fresh beauty, to become the companion for life of one who would be a constant care; who could not bear to have you from his side one moment?"

A glad light suffused Victoria's face, but ere she could reply Andrew stood before them. She quickly withdrew her hand from Roger's, whose sad countenance became still sadder.

"Ah, here you are," said Andrew, noting with his



keen eyes the disturbed faces before him. "What, Roger! Are you without the bandage?"

"Yes," said Roger gloomily. "I can see as well without it, as with it. Darkness and daylight are as one with me now. God help me!" He rose and Andrew passed his arm through his brother's.

"Dear old boy don't give way like this. The doctor's decision may be favorable. Don't borrow trouble."

"Oh no, I'm not borrowing," said Roger, with a laugh, sadder than any tears. "It is thrust upon me free gratis. There is no need to borrow. Come, tell me of yourself Andrew. Mother tells me you are up for Governor. Do you stand the ghost of a chance, think you?"

"Not so much as the tenth part of a ghost, dear fellow. The Whigs will carry the day in spite of our heavy electioneering, and I hope they will. I'd never consented to run if I had dreamed of getting elected. I'd make a fine Governor, wouldn't I?"

"You'd be far better than the present one I reckon, even if you are but twenty-two. Cousin Victoria?"

"Victoria is not here," replied Andrew. "She is out of sight, gone toward the lodge."

"Then let us go to the house, Andrew. Great God! what an affliction is mine if I never regain my sight. I had rather lost a limb, aye, all of them, than to have lost my eyes. Ah, my brother, the doctor's decision means everything to me!"

"Were you making love to Victoria as I came up?" asked Andrew, darting a glance at Roger, which fortunately he could not see.

"Not exactly," replied Roger rather ironically, remembering the recent conversation. "It takes two to make love generally."

Andrew's dark face lightened. "Then she was not agreeable?"

"How could a sensible woman listen to the wild ravings of an imbecile?" said Roger, bitterly. "What girl, young and beautiful, would willingly yoke herself to a cripple for life? I must have been an ass, a two-fold idiot, to let my feelings carry me away, but by heavens, Andy! if the doctor gives me hope—Hope! Oh, God, what a blessed word; if he gives me hope, I'll win her, but——"



"If he tells you nothing can be done?" asked Andrew, eagerly.

"There will be but one course left for me," replied Roger, again pointing to the lake.

"Ah, no, old boy, not that," and Andrew placed his arm about Roger's neck. "Mother would die heart broken. You are still her darling, and will always be. I'm content to take second place in her affections, and Roger you must not become morbid. Its the worst thing you can possibly do. Come, let us go up to the house, and I will play on my violin, and so chase dull care away."

Andrew scrutinized Victoria's face when next he saw her, but it was serene and unconscious. "She does not care a rap for Roger," he thought exultantly, "for she could never hide it so admirably. She would betray herself by word or action." Which shows that Andrew knew but little of the sublime duplicity of woman.

That night the doctor came, and when morning dawned fair and rosy, Roger was told what to him seemed his death-warrant. Out under the nodding trees, arm and arm, the great oculist and Roger paced, while gently as a mother could have done, the man of science old in years, explained to the young man just on the threshold of a long life, why he could never again look upon the faces of those he loved, or study nature in all its varied forms. Roger listened in silence, then, as they approached the old stone seat, he said: "Leave me here, doctor, I would be alone." The doctor was deceived by Roger's calmness and left him. The stricken man buried his face in his hands, and listened to the doctor's retreating footsteps. "He will soon be out of sight and hearing," he murmured, "then I will go my way, and nobody will be the wiser until too late. Will *she* shed one tear for me, I wonder? Yes, I reckon she will. She is tender-hearted, and she will grieve with my mother. Poor mother, *she* loves me, but oh, I cannot live with this load at my heart. An object of pity, tolerated, where once I was the most sought after. Is it wicked, I wonder, to take one's own life under such circumstances? God knows, and I will know soon. Let me think. I used to know just how many paces to take from this old stone to the lake. Ah, yes, it is fifteen. I was just that age when I fashioned this seat.



I have a 'kerchief of Victoria's which I stole one day. It is perfumed with vervaine. How I love the odor! How I love the owner of this little dainty square!"

He took the 'kerchief from his breast pocket and kissed it. Then holding it tightly in one hand, he began to measure off the paces toward the lake, counting them aloud as he paced. When he had reached the thirteenth, a pair of arms were suddenly thrown around him, and Victoria's voice cried: "Roger, what would you do? Destroy two lives instead of one?"

"Victoria, you here!" exclaimed Roger. "Why did you come so soon? If you had only waited a few moments—just a few moments."

"Ah, but I could not wait, dear Roger; something compelled me to seek you, and having found you in the act of self-destruction, I have detained you long enough to say, that if you are still bent on drowning, go ahead; but I warn you that you will have to answer to God for two lives."

"What do you mean?" gasped Roger, clutching Victoria's arm.

"I mean that if you go, I go too." }

"Victoria!"

"Well, I am here."

"Did I hear aright?"

"I am within good hearing distance: You could not have misunderstood me very well."

"Are you willing to brave death with me?"

"Yes, if you are still bent on suicide, but I would much prefer to live with you on good solid pork and potatoes. We could get more fun out of it. Oh, Roger, if you only knew how ridiculous you looked measuring off those fifteen paces."

Now no person about to commit suicide likes to be laughed at, and as Victoria's gay laugh rang out, Roger's face looked uncommonly silly.

"Um," he said gloomily, "how long had you been here before you spoke, Victoria?"

"Oh for quite a while, sir knight of the rueful countenance. I saw the doctor returning alone, so as I had something to whisper into your ear when no one was by, I hastened down to the old stone seat."

"Were you there when I kissed your 'kerchief?"

"Right behind you, and I didn't admire your taste at



all. I considered the kisses wasted when you might have had the owner. Oh, you stupid, silly boy, must I do all the courting?"

Roger grasped Victoria's hands and held them tightly, while a great hope shone in his face.

"Victoria, you are not trifling with me? What means this sudden change in you? Yesterday you drew your hand away as if in displeasure at what I said, and you have seemed to avoid me ever since. I have not dared to hope."

Victoria laughed. "Do you not remember, Roger, that Andrew came upon the scene just as you asked me that question? Do you suppose I cared to make a third party an interested listener? I am here to give you my answer, which I hope will please you. It is, that I love you, eyes or no eyes; that I am willing to face anything so long as you are by my side."

Roger drew her to him, and laid her sunny head upon his shoulder. "My loved one, dare I take this blessed hope to my bosom? Are you sure that it is not pity which prompts you, and that you are not making a sacrifice for my sake?"

Victoria took his face in her hands and kissed his sightless eyes. "It is no sacrifice on my part, dear Roger. I worshiped your picture before I ever knew you. I have loved you always, I think. Just because you are blind, should I cease to love you?"

"Oh, God, I thank Thee!" cried Roger. "I thank Thee for the gift of a true, pure woman's love, which Thou has sent me in this my hour of need." He bared his head, and turned his sightless eyes toward the heavens. Then placing an arm about Victoria's neck, he kissed her reverently upon the forehead. "What a magic healer is this divine love, dear sweetheart. An hour ago I longed for death. Now I long to live, for I have been given new life by one who loves me. Ah, how blessed am I to be made the recipient of such an affection. God bless you, my own."

Victoria gently led him to the old stone seat. "Then you have entirely given up the idea of a watery grave?" she asked, banteringly, as they were seated.

He placed both arms around her, and laid his head upon her shoulder. "Don't mention it again, dear love. Think if you had come too late."



"Ah, but I determined yesterday not to leave you for one moment alone. I watched the doctor and you. I was not far behind you when he left you. I had you in surveillance, young man, and from this moment I constitute myself your private detective."



## CHAPTER VI.

THE lovers walked back to the house planning their future. Mary, who had been anxiously waiting for Roger, met them as they entered. Roger had been extremely melancholy for several days, and Mary feared the effects of the doctor's decision upon his nervous system, but as she saw his beaming countenance, and the tender smile which he bestowed upon Victoria, she realized that something wonderful had happened.

"Here is your mother, dear Roger," whispered Victoria. "Shall we tell her?"

"Of course, no one will rejoice more than she. Dear mother, the very dearest mother in all the world, I've found a daughter for you. She has promised to be my wife. Wish me joy, for joy unspeakable is mine."

Mary clasped Victoria in her arms. "My precious child, I have prayed for this day, but I did not think my prayers would be answered so soon. Thank God for his goodness." She kissed Roger tenderly. "So the doctor's decision had no terrors for you, my son?"

"Not after this blessing came to me, dear mother. An hour ago I was bewailing my fate. Now I am the happiest man alive. Nothing can terrify me so long as I have the assurance of this dear girl's love. God bless her."

Victoria ran laughing from the room, only to meet her mother in the hall. "Whither so fast, my dear?" called Lady Vale.

"You are wanted in the library," was all the reply Victoria made.

Lady Vale was far from pleased at the news which Mary hastened to impart. She had indeed promised Mary that she would not interfere between the young people, if they chose to love each other, but she had relied on Victoria's good sense in avoiding anything approaching tenderness on Roger's part, and she had been so imprudent as to fall in love herself. Lady Vale had different views regarding Victoria's future. There were



many brilliant parti's in England. Men of noble birth, who were sure to succeed in life, and who could place Victoria on the highest round of the ladder. What imbecility to bury herself in this obscure place, just because of her generosity of heart, and womanly sympathy, had led her to think she loved a blind man. Lady Vale set her thin lips quite firmly together, as she noticed Mary's radiant face and Roger's evident happiness.

"Ah, Augusta, how happy we shall all be here together," said Mary, "for of course you will dispose of your English estates, and live here with us. This house is large enough for half a dozen families."

"Are you not looking too hastily into the future, my friend?" said Lady Vale, coldly. "Victoria has more than myself to consult. She is not yet eighteen. Her guardian's consent is needed. She is much too young to think of marrying. Sir William Pelham will at least think so, I am sure. He has full control of her until her eighteenth birthday. I can do nothing." She did not add that she would lose no time in penning a letter to Sir William, enjoining him in strictest confidence to withhold his consent to this to her distasteful marriage. Her speech was like a cold-water douche to her hearers.

"How soon will she become eighteen?" asked Roger.

"Next December."

"Then will she be free to do as she chooses?"

"She does not come into her dower until she is twenty-one," replied Lady Vale, evasively.

"But she can marry at the age of eighteen?" persisted Roger.

"No doubt she can," returned Lady Vale, "but girls at that age are fickle. She may have changed her mind by then."

Mary looked sadly at her friend. She saw that Lady Vale was far from pleased at Victoria's choice, and as she thought of it she could hardly blame her. If she had been blessed with a lovely high-born daughter, would she willingly have consented to her wedding a comparative nobody; moreover one so afflicted as Roger? She laid her hand on Lady Vale's shoulder. "Dear Augusta, let the children settle this matter between them. If Victoria repents of her choice; if she wishes at any time to be released, Roger will immediately give her her freedom. Is it not so, my son?"



"Most assuredly so, mother. I have no wish but for Victoria's complete happiness. She shall not be bound by any promise, except by her own sweet will. I am human enough to be selfish, and to crave her love and care, but I am not so selfish that I will not seek her happiness before my own."

Lady Vale smiled and placed her hand in Roger's. "Then you do not insist upon an engagement, or a formal announcement of marriage until Victoria is her own mistress? I have no need to write to Sir William."

"That is for Victoria to decide, Lady Vale. I leave her free to do as she chooses. Whatever she thinks is right will please me."

Lady Vale cordially shook his hand, and after kissing Mary, left the room in search of Victoria. She had already decided that the quicker they left for England, the better it would be for all concerned. Victoria, parted from Roger, would soon forget him, and once back at Valecourt, Lady Vale would see to it that her daughter never held any communication with her blind lover. She found Victoria in their private apartments, busily engaged in giving her French poodle a bath.

"So my daughter, who has never seemed anything but a child to me, loves somebody else better than her old mother, and is going to forsake her," and Lady Vale kissed Victoria while a convenient tear dropped on her cheek.

"Oh, no, mamma, I am not going to forsake you. We can all live here so cosily together, and you ought not to say that I love somebody better than you. Did you love grandma less because you loved papa too? Of course I love Roger, but it is a different love than that which I bear you."

"You forget, my love, how impossible it would be for me to live here altogether. I must be at Valecourt a part of the year. It is high time we were returning now. We had better start in a few days. It is considered highly improper to remain in the house with your *fiancé*."

Victoria stopped scrubbing the poodle, and looked with astonished eyes at her mother. "But, mamma, I cannot leave Roger. We are to be married so soon it would be hardly worth our while to leave and then come back. It would be better to all go together."



"Indeed?" interrogated Lady Vale, slightly raising her eyebrows, "and may I ask when you intend becoming Mrs. Willing?"

"Well, we thought in a month, sure, mamma. Roger needs me now if at any time, and I don't see what we want to wait for. Of course we shall be married quietly, and that will please both of us."

"You certainly have not lost any time in arranging matters, Victoria; you seem to have forgotten that Sir William must be consulted, and that your mother requires a certain amount of obedience shown her."

Victoria opened her eyes quite wide. "Why, mamma, I never dreamed that you would have the slightest objection. I have been so used to doing as I thought best, that I never once thought but what you would be as delighted as Roger's mother. She certainly does not object, and what has Sir William to say about it?"

"He can say a great deal, my child. If you marry without his consent before you are eighteen, your landed estates go to me, to hold until my death. Then they revert to your cousin, Dora Vale. There is but very little ready money you know. Less than a thousand pounds I think."

"But why should Sir William refuse to let me marry whom I wish?"

"For the very same reason your dear papa would have if he were alive. He would say that you were too young to know your own mind. Come, Victoria, listen to reason. Let us go back to England, to dear old Valecourt. I promise not to interfere between you and your love, but take plenty of time to make your decision, then when you are eighteen, if you are still of the same mind, I will not withhold my consent to your marriage, after a suitable time, say two or three years."

"Two or three years!" gasped Victoria. "Why that is an eternity. How nice it is to have somebody map out your life for you. Oh no, mamma, we don't wait two years or even two months. I don't wish to seem disrespectful to you in what I am saying, but I think I am old enough to know my own mind, and not to be treated like a great baby. Roger would die before the two years were passed, and so would I. If Sir William chooses to withhold his consent, he may for all us, and Dora Vale is welcome to the estates. They will be a



Godsend to the poor girl. She is a governess, or something, is she not? If justice were her's half of it would belong to her. Just because her father married beneath him, as grandpapa thought, he must needs be cut off with the proverbial shilling. Turn about is fair play, I'm sure. If I marry without Sir William's consent, I only return to Dora what is rightfully her own."

Lady Vale shook her head. "Headstrong like your father," she said, turning to leave the room. "The least opposition to your wishes only makes you the more determined, but I warn you, Victoria, while there is yet time, to pause, and reason whether it will give you pleasure to offend your parent for the whim of a moment. I do not easily forgive."

She went out leaving Victoria sitting on the floor of the bath-room, holding the dripping poodle in her arms. "Flotsie, mamma's the angriest I ever have seen her, but we don't care. She wants me to do as she likes, and I want to do as I like, and I'll win the day, of course. She can't remain angry with her only daughter so very long."

Flotsie shook her long, silky ears, and barked intelligently, and so the conference ended.

Lady Vale exploded a bomb at the luncheon table by quietly saying: "A sailing vessel starts for Queenstown next Wednesday. I have written to engage passage for myself and Victoria. We have had a most enjoyable time here, and have staid much longer than we should have done. It will be early September ere we reach home, and we have many important engagements for September."

Her announcement was received with different emotions, by the different persons assembled around the table.

Andrew, who had been away all the morning, and who therefore had not heard of the important event which had happened in his absence, looked up with a strange sinking at the heart. To lose Victoria now meant certain failure. He was gaining more influence over her every day, and it would be only a question of time, when he could keep her under his mesmeric power for hours if he chose, and then he would be able to carry out the plan he had formed. He must in some way thwart Lady Vale, and prevent her from leaving America for some time at least.



"You must not think of leaving us for months yet," he said. "We are only just getting acquainted. We had counted upon having you with us all winter, had we not, mother?"

"Yes, indeed," said Mary, casting an appealing glance at Victoria. "How can we part with Victoria, who has grown to be one of us?" She divined Lady Vale's intentions regarding her daughter, and felt sad accordingly.

Roger said nothing, but his face which had seemed so radiant a few moments ago, looked gray and troubled. Victoria was watching her lover. She saw the shadows fall upon his face, and her own clouded while she glanced at her mother with flashing eyes. "Mamma may go, if she chooses, but *I* stay here."

"Open war is declared," exclaimed Andrew, laughing, who thought Victoria only in fun.

"Yes, it *is* open war," replied Victoria, rising and moving to Roger's side. Mamma knew my plans before luncheon. She thinks to frustrate them by taking me back to England, and so separate me from Roger, but I have promised him never to leave him, and I shall keep my word."

Roger turned his head, and kissed his sweetheart's hand, which was lying on his shoulder.

Andrew started to his feet. "Never leave him," he repeated. "Do you mean to say that you are going to marry my brother?"

"Why not," replied Victoria, quickly. "Is there any law to prevent it?"

Andrew saw that his violent emotion was drawing attention toward himself, so with an effort he mastered his passion and became seated, saying with a laugh which sounded forced: "Well, this is the greatest surprise I ever experienced. It nearly took my breath away. You two have been uncommonly sly to spring so unexpected a pleasure upon the rest of us poor mortals. It is not too late for congratulations, I hope?"

"Oh, no," replied Victoria, blushing as she felt Andrew's piercing eyes bent upon her. "It only happened this morning, and it seems not to have met with the approval of all concerned."

"I am delighted," said Andrew, rising and taking Victoria's hand. "Roger is to be congratulated, and



so are we all for gaining such an acquisition to our family."

Mary rose and went over to Lady Vale. "I am sure you will withdraw your decision of so soon returning home, dear Augusta, now that you see how united we may all become."

"I shall sail on Wednesday, and Victoria will accompany me," replied Lady Vale with more haughtiness in her manner than the gentle Mary had ever witnessed.

Roger arose and, led by Victoria, left the room. They sought their favorite seat near the lake. "Well, my darling," said Roger sadly, "your mother will prevail I suppose, and carry you away from me."

"Never!" interrupted Victoria. "I'm not a baby in swadling clothes."

"But you are under age, pet. Your mother will influence that man, who is your guardian, to be nasty toward us, and who knows what may happen after we are separated. I am very much afraid we shall never meet again. It is not as if I had my eyes, sweet one. Once I would have defied them to have taken you away."

"Do you care if I lose my estates, Roger? Would you take me poor as a church mouse?"

"Do I care if you are poor? Why, my darling, I can't begin to use the money I have now, what would I do with more?"

"Then I'll marry you to-morrow."

"Your mother will never consent."

"We will dispense with her consent, dear Roger. When we return to the house man and wife she will bow to the inevitable, and laugh with the rest of us. It's a long way off to my birthday. One hundred and fifty days." She said this so naively that Roger immediately took her in his arms and kissed her repeatedly. "Oh, my angel, what an age to be kept in durance vile."

"Yes, Roger, an awfully long time, and so many things can happen in that time. All I lose by marrying you now are my estates, which will revert to a little cousin whom I have seen but twice. Grandpapa disinherited her father for daring to marry a governess, so papa got it all. Now little Dora will get it back; that is when mamma is through with it, so you see I am really playing the good Samaritan in two cases—marrying you, and enriching Dora."



"Ah, you witch," cried Roger, catching her to him again. "Who could resist your sweet persuasive tongue. Not I. Do with me what you will. We cannot be married too soon to suit me. Shall we enlist Andrew in our behalf?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Victoria quickly. "He—he—" she stopped confused.

"He—he—he what?" laughed Roger. "He don't want you himself, does he?"

Victoria was silent. Roger held her with such force that she almost screamed. "Has he ever made love to you, my darling?"

"Just a little, a long time ago, but I think he has given up all thoughts of it lately."

"Well I should hope he had," said Roger, somewhat dryly.

"But do you know, Roger, dear, I am awfully afraid of him at times. He has such a peculiar manner, and really fascinates me in a way I cannot describe to you. I like him, and still I hate him. I am drawn toward him, yet he repels me. Did you ever know of his having any mesmeric power?"

"No, he was always a quiet fellow. I never understood him. There has never been that love with us which is said to exist so strongly between twins; but you are mine now, dearest; you will soon be his brother's wife, and as such are sacred. Now, when shall we be married, sweetheart?"

"As soon as possible, Roger. We will confide in your mother. She will help us out I know, and see to all things needful. Oh, love, it don't seem possible that I am so soon to be all your very own."



## CHAPTER VII.

THE parties left by the young couple in the dining-room separated without a word. Mary went to her own room in tears. She feared for Roger if Victoria should leave him. He had confided to his mother how nearly he had come to taking his life that day, and how he had been saved by an angel. For the first time in the friendship of over forty years, Mary felt her heart angered toward Lady Vale. She was taking the wrong course to so oppose two such hot-headed people as Victoria and Roger, and Mary resolved to go in search of her friend and lay the matter seriously before her.

As for Andrew, his whole being was in a state of torment. The announcement had come upon him so suddenly that he half doubted his own ears and eyes. "Victoria in love with his blind brother? Absurd! Did not *he* control her heart? Was *he* not gaining an influence over her whereby she would in time be all his own? And did Roger think for a moment that the prize was his? Well, he would soon let him know who held the whip hand. He would mesmerize Victoria when he knew Roger was where he could hear them, and then he would compel her to say things which should cause Roger to believe her false. Oh, this was not a losing game for him yet. Oh, no."

He walked out of the house and toward the lake. As he neared the stone seat he espied the lovers clasped in each others arms. The sight maddened him. All the evil in his nature came to the surface. He turned on his heel muttering, "Ah! how dearly shall he pay for every kiss lavished upon her who is mine alone. Oh, how I hate him for coming between us, for she was beginning to love me, I know it, but she shall love me again, I swear it. Oh, if the devil were only here, so that I might make a compact with him. How quickly would I sell my soul for the price of her love." He went into the summer house and threw himself upon the wooden seat, and abandoned his thoughts to wicked



nefarious schemes, whereby he might win Victoria from Roger.

Mary at once lent her ear to Victoria's plans, but she first pleaded with Lady Vale to consent to an early marriage. Lady Vale coldly listened until Mary had pleaded her case, then she calmly answered that she should take Victoria with her Wednesday, and leave the matter entirely in the hands of Sir William, in whose wisdom and judgment she had perfect faith. Mary left the room in despair, and sought Victoria to whom she told her failure.

"I knew you would meet with no success," replied Victoria. Mamma is very determined. So am I. Now, come, dear Mrs. Willing, you must see about getting the necessary papers drawn up, as of course Roger cannot be of much assistance, only by being present, and the speedier our marriage is consummated the more at ease we shall feel."

Andrew little thought, as he assisted Victoria to a seat in the family carriage the next day, that he had touched for the last time Victoria Vale's hand. That when next he saw her she would be Victoria Willing. He would not have worn so confident an air as he watched the carriage disappear, in which were also his mother and Roger, if he had suspected that his brother was about to make his own the girl who *he* considered was already within *his* power.

The three occupants of the carriage were strangely silent for a wedding party. Mary held Roger's hand within her own. He frequently raised the slender hand to his lips in mute silence. She knew his thoughts. They were full of gratitude for what she was doing, and although her heart misgave her, she would have dared much more for the pleasure of seeing her darling son happy.

Victoria looked out the carriage-window at the trees, whose branches seemed to wave her a friendly adieu. She could almost hear them sigh: "Farewell, Victoria Vale. Adieu, fair maiden. When next we see thee, thou shalt be a loved and loving wife. Thou wilt have taken upon thyself vows which God alone can't break." She glanced at Roger, whose sightless eyes were turned toward her, and whose face expressed the joy which was in his heart. Did she regret the step which she was



about to take? Not at all. She felt no misgivings for the future, only an ecstatic joy; a sense of sweetest rest. She trusted that God's blessing was resting upon her, although she was disobedient to her mother.

Two hours later as the sun was just sinking, leaving a trail of crimson glory on "the Five Gables," the carriage deposited the three conspirators at the marble steps of the grand entrance. Victoria, immediately upon alighting, slipped her arm through Roger's. "Come, my husband, let us go and make our peace with mamma." She led him to her mother's apartments. Lady Vale was superintending the packing of two huge boxes, and looked up as the door opened and the two culprits stood before her. Something in their faces warned her of what was coming. Her face became stern and cold. "Well, you two are married?" she said, before either could speak.

Victoria gave a little scream and cried: "Who could have told you?"

"Your faces are the tale bearers," returned Lady Vale. "You do not need to utter a word. I am not going to heap reproaches upon your heads as you evidently expect, and then mildly pronounce a blessing over you. All that I might, can, or shall say, will be communicated to you by my lawyer. From this hour I have no child. Victoria has chosen a man whom she has known scarcely two months, in preference to the mother who bore her, and who has loved her devotedly. So let it be. I do not love her any more, and I warn her that God will visit his wrath justly upon her, as he does on all disobedient children. No good can spring from this hasty marriage. Nothing but evil."

"Mother!" cried Victoria, springing toward Lady Vale, "you are not cursing me?"

"No, Victoria. God shall curse you; not I. Leave me now, I do not wish to see you again while I remain. Rachel will soon have all the boxes belonging to me filled. Then I shall start for New York."

"No, no! dear mother, stay here with us. I cannot have you go away with such a bitter feeling in your heart toward Roger and me. Or if you go, let us go with you. Forgive us, darling mamma. See, I kneel to you." Victoria sank upon her knees and threw her arms about Lady Vale. "I do not love you the less for loving



Roger too, dear mamma. Will you not make us happy by giving us your blessing?"

Lady Vale disengaged her daughter's clinging arms. "Arise, Victoria, your pleadings are but a mere form. No loving, obedient daughter, could have so disgraced her mother as you have done this day. Did I not tell you that I had no daughter?"

Victoria gave a low wail as if struck to the heart, essayed to rise from her knees, but ere she could regain her feet she fell forward in a dead faint, breathing the name of "Roger" as she fell.

Lady Vale gazed upon the prostrate form of Victoria while Roger swiftly groped his way to her side. "Oh, God, if I could but see!" he cried. He kneeled and took his wife in his arms, softly stroking her face. Lady Vale pulled the bell cord, at the same time telling her maid Rachel to bring water.

Roger turned his sightless eyes in the direction of Lady Vale, his fine face aglow with indignation. "Madam," he said slowly, "we may have incurred your displeasure, but we are not deserving of such bitter anger as you have shown. For myself I do not care. I shall endeavor to bear up against God's wrath, which you seem to think will be so plentifully showered upon us; but my wife, by right of law, I am bound to honor and protect, you have used words toward her this day which I, for one, shall be slow to forget. In all courtesy to you as my mother's guest, I cannot turn you from her house, but Victoria is mine. No earthly power can take her from me, and I advise you not to try it."

At this moment Mary appeared at the door followed by two servants. "What has happened?" she cried, as she saw the agitated face of her son, with Victoria's senseless form in his arms.

"Mother, I wish the servants to take Victoria to my apartments. I will explain matters when we are alone."

Lady Vale turned suddenly toward Mary. "Did you have a hand in this scheme to rob me of my daughter, Mrs. Mary Willing?"

Mary started at the unwonted usage of her full name by one who had never called her anything but "Mary." "I was present at the marriage of Victoria and my son. It was no scheme, and nobody has tried to rob you of your daughter."



"You have said enough," returned Lady Vale, shrugging her shoulders. "I have lost a friend as well as a daughter," and with these words she passed into an adjoining room, closing the door after her.

Mary stood completely unnerved gazing at the closed door, while the servants who were supposed to be without eyes or ears at such times, tenderly lifted Victoria and bore her to Roger's apartments. "Are you here, mother?" he asked. Mary roused herself from the semi-stupor which seemed to have taken possession of her. "Yes, my son."

"Then give me your arm, and while we are walking through the halls I will tell you of Lady Vale's unjust anger."

Mary felt saddened at what Roger told her, and as she helped to restore Victoria to sensibility, she wondered if Lady Vale had ever possessed a heart, for to one of Mary's gentle nature, the course which Victoria's mother had taken, seemed cruel in the extreme; and when she witnessed Victoria's grief, which even Roger's loving words and caresses could not assuage, she went herself to plead her new daughter's cause with the incensed mother; but Lady Vale's door was barred against all intruders, and Rachel, with a dignity born of the quarrel between her superiors, told Mary that her mistress would see no one, and that in two hours she would be en route for New York. Lady Vale wished to leave the house as a stranger. With these words Rachel closed the door in Mary's face, who walked sadly away. Ere she reached her room she met Andrew, who seemed much agitated. As he caught sight of his mother his dark face became more sullen and sinister, and he said as he grasped her arm: "What is this that I hear the servants gossiping over and commenting upon? Is it true that Victoria has married Roger, and that *you* and the coachman were the only witnesses of the ceremony?" Mary trembled, for so she had seen her husband many times when in a fury. "Speak, woman!"

Mary raised her eyes. "Woman!" she echoed. "Is it thus that you address your mother, Andrew?"

Andrew bent until his face nearly touched Mary's. "Yes, woman!" he repeated. "By what other name shall I call you? Do you know that I am going mad? That



a thousand demons are whispering horrible things into my ears? Do you know that you have helped to rob me of the only thing I ever loved on earth? Great God! What shall I do if I have lost her!"

Andrew's mad ravings were too much for Mary's already overtaxed nerves, and without a word, but with a horror in her eyes which Andrew never forgot, she fell as one dead at his feet. In an instant Andrew's passion cooled. He took his mother in his arms and bore her to her room. The drawn look about her mouth frightened him. Something peculiar in the set lines of her face warned him that this was more than a mere fainting fit. He rang for assistance and sent a man on the swiftest horse for medical aid. When it came Mary was beyond all earthly cares and sorrows. Kind and willing hands labored unceasingly for hours over the still form, but to no purpose. Life had fled, and when Lady Vale left "The Gables," she knew not that the soul of its beloved mistress had also left it never to return, nor did she know, until months had passed.

Roger seemed stupified at this awful blow which had fallen without warning, and helplessly clung to Victoria, who roused herself to act when she divined the truth. It was she who thought of everything, proving herself such a treasure that Andrew's admiration grew, and even in his sorrow at his mother's death, his scheming brain was busily trying to divine how best to separate Roger from the girl who he would not acknowledge was his brother's wife. She was his own still. He had proved *that* in Roger's very presence, by merely taking her hand in his and stroking it gently, while he spoke of what great pleasure it gave him to welcome her as a sister. What comfort would be Roger's with such a loving companion, and although their mother's death had been most untimely, she must not regard it as an evil omen following so closely upon the marriage. All the while he talked he noticed with satisfaction that she did not shrink from his touch, but gradually leaned toward him until her head rested upon his shoulder, and she lay passive in his arms. He looked over to Roger whose sorrowful face and sightless eyes should have appealed to his heart, but Andrew had no heart, except where his own interests were concerned, and he looked



at his brother, so unconscious of the wrong he was doing him, and thought how he would stab him through this fair creature who was controlled by his will to do his bidding, and who would not disobey him, even though he told her to kill the husband whom she adored.



## BOOK THE SECOND.

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### CHAPTER I.

FIFTEEN YEARS LATER.

"THE Five Gables" is not much the worse for the wear and tear of fifteen summers and winters. It still stands an irregular shape on the high bluff looking down on its humbler neighbors as if proud of its ugly magnificence. But if the mansion has not changed, can the same be said of the dwellers therein? Let us see. No one will forbid us walking up the steps of the porch, and entering the low window which leads into what seems to be a study and library in one. A man sits at an open desk busily engaged in writing. His black hair is plentifully streaked with grey. His face, although not old, has deep lines graven upon it which ought not to be seen on any but one bowed down with a weight of sin. His eyes are peculiarly sad, and have a hunted look, strange in its intensity, as he looks up from his writing to welcome a tall, fair woman, who opens the door and comes swiftly to his side, laying a white hand on his shoulder. "Still pouring over those old law papers, Andrew?" she said, playfully placing her other hand over the closely written sheets of foolscap. "Why you are making an old man of yourself, working so persistently, you spend the greater part of your time in this musty old study. Every night you have a repast served to you here, and I am sure there are times when you do not retire until the wee small hours. Why do you toil so laboriously? Surely we have an abundance of riches, more than we can ever use. Then why not take a little recreation occasionally? I scarcely see you except at meal hours, and very often those too are spent by you here."

Andrew turned his head and pressed his lips to the



hand still resting on his shoulder. "Have I been so lacking in husbandly care, that you are forced to complain of being neglected, my dear wife? Forgive me, sweet one. Come in front of me that I may see your face. Ah, there is a little frown upon it which must be charmed away." He rose and pressed an arm around her, playfully tapping the tiny wrinkles on her forehead. She laughed and pointed to the papers. "But you are evading my question, Andrew. Is it necessary that you should dig and delve amongst these musty old things the greater part of your time?"

"Highly necessary, my sweet wife, or I should not do it, rest assured of that; but I hope to be soon through."

"Ah, but you said that seven years ago. I don't see as you are any nearer through than then. Many people have remarked to me of your altered appearance. Mrs. Bradley said yesterday, that you look like a man who has a secret grief. Is there anything troubling you, Andrew? If there is, can I know and share it with you?"

Andrew drew his wife's head down upon his shoulder, so that she might not see the look of anguish which he knew was on his face. His lips trembled for a moment ere he replied, and he looked out of the window wistfully, longingly, as if he were trying to banish an evil spirit or conjure a protecting one. "What should trouble me, my sweetheart? Have I not the dearest wife in all the land, the mother of my cherub child? Mrs. Bradley is an old busy body, who delights in scenting mysteries. Tell her if she inquires after my health again, that I am losing my reason because of the fatality with which the number thirteen pursues me. That will set her into a new train of thought. I believe number thirteen is one of the hobbies she is riding at present."

"Nonsense, Andrew, you are only fooling. You are too sensible to let anything so simple annoy you, but I am forgetting my errand. We have an invitation to a birthday feté, and barbecue at Oakdale, the Parker's country seat, you know. The festivities are to occupy three days, and they begin next week Tuesday. We can easily drive there in a day, by resting our horses. We can start Monday and return Friday."

Again Andrew's face clouded with that indescribable melancholy look. "I cannot go, dear one, but I will



not deprive you of what I know may be pleasure. Go, take Mary with you, and remain as long as you like."

"There it is again, Andrew. You deprive yourself of all pleasure just because of these old law papers. I have a mind to come in here some time when you are out, and burn the whole business, only I can never gain an entrance when you are not here. One would think you had treasures untold stored here the way you guard this room. Why, Andrew, we have been married seven years and we have never even taken our wedding journey. You could never spare the time."

Andrew stroked the little rings of hair from off his wife's forehead, and kissed her with a remorseful look in his eyes which she did not see. "Do you chafe under this quiet home life, dear one? Would you like a change? If so take our child and visit England."

"Not without you, Andrew. When I have been absent for only a day I can see how my absence annoys you. I can see with what joy I am welcomed home again, and Andrew, it is not my neighbor alone who has noticed the change in you. I, too, have watched this growing melancholy which shuts you so completely within yourself. Sometimes I have seen you clasp Mary to you with such fervor as to frighten the child, and your eyes look at her so strangely, as if you feared some harm might come to her."

Andrew unloosed his clasp and strode nervously to the window, and stood for some time gazing out. What were his thoughts? Who but his God could know? Suddenly he turned and once again took his wife in his arms. "Victoria, have you ever regretted becoming my wife? Has there been at any time cause for regret on your part?"

"Never, Andrew. You have been all that a most tender, devoted husband could ever be. In fact when I have seen your anger displayed toward others, I have often wondered how it is that to me, who gives you ample provocation, you are so kind and tender."

He placed his hand under her chin and looked into her eyes. "Do you still mourn for Roger? Are you satisfied with my love and devotion? Do you think that if he had lived he could have cared for you better than I?"

Victoria burst into tears. "You are cruel, Andrew.



In this continual referring to a dead past which can never be recalled, you hurt me. Have I not told you that I can never love you with that freshness which I gave to Roger? Were you not at the time contented to take me with a bleeding heart, which since then God has mercifully healed by giving unto me my blessed Mary? Why, then, will you persist in opening this old wound?"

"Because I long for you to give me the same worshipping love which I lavish upon you, dear wife."

Victoria shook her head. "That would be impossible, Andrew. Even Roger, though he loved me, did not give me the tender devotion which at all times you have done. I hardly think any woman of my acquaintance can say truthfully that in seven years of married life, they have never received a word of blame or censure from their husbands. I am proud that I can say it. Few women are blessed with such devotion as falls to my lot. No woman lives who could return it in like manner."

Andrew clasped her closer. "You love me better than you did at first, Victoria?"

"Why should I not? To others you are cold and unapproachable. To me and Mary you are all tenderness and love. God bless you."

Andrew shivered as if a cold wind had penetrated his being, and put his hand before his eyes. "Don't, Victoria!" he said, in an unsteady tone. "Ask God to curse me. If there be a God, He surely will."

"Andrew, husband, I beg of you to cease that scoffing tone which seems to be growing upon you. Say there is a God. Not 'if there be a God.' You know there is, or why are we permitted to live? Do not let Mary grow up with the knowledge of having an infidel father. For her sake, if not for mine, be like other people. Accompany us to church next Sabbath. You have never entered one since our marriage."

"We will not argue this point, Victoria," said Andrew, gently, but firmly. "I shall never enter any church while I am in this frame of mind. I am hypocrite enough without adding to my sin, God knows, if there is such a being."

"What sin, Andrew! Why do you speak so wildly?"

Andrew tried to laugh. "Are we not all sinners,



Victoria, in the sight of that God in whom you believe?"

"Ah, yes," sighed Victoria. "We are, indeed, miserable sinners; but you frightened me when you spoke so wildly, and you give rise to very unpleasant comments by your morbid, unfriendly ways. Can I not coax you to think better of your hasty decision, and so attend this barbecue with me?"

"Ask anything of me but to absent myself from home, dear wife. That I cannot do."

Victoria turned to leave the room. Andrew's troubled eyes followed her. "You are not angry with me, Victoria?"

"No, it would be silly of me to become angry over so simple a thing, but I am puzzled at your strange manner, Andrew. I fear you are concealing something which I ought to know."

Andrew sank into a chair as Victoria left the room, and as he laid his head upon the table a heavy groan came from his white, trembling lips. Now that he was alone all the gayety of manner assumed to deceive Victoria left him, and the wretched man writhed in agony of spirit, until the drops of moisture rolled from his face, and covered the manuscript lying upon the table with great unsightly blots. "Concealing something which she ought to know," he murmured. "Great God! if she only knew, if she only knew. If I dared tell her would the telling bring me peace? Would it bring me a sweet dreamless sleep, such as I have not known in fifteen years? Christ! Fifteen eternities have I lived in these years, but if I tell her I shall loose her, and ah, more bitter still, I shall loose my sunbeam, my little Mary. No, no, I can not, dare not tell her. She is beginning to love me. In time she will forget *him* and then, ah, what bliss will be mine when I shall hear her say 'I love thee better than ever I loved thy brother.' I scoff at religion in her presence, and pretend that I think there is no God, but merciful Father! do I not know that some day I shall be called to account for my crimes? That there is no hope for me in this world nor the next? Then, how dare I bend my knee in reverence and piety, when nothing but evil thoughts throng my brain?"

At this moment the door quietly opened and the roguish face of a child of six years peeped slyly in.



Her laughing eyes grew serious as she heard the sobs of her father. She held a hideous rag doll in her arms, and as she stole on tip toe into the room, she placed one chubby finger on the slit where the doll's mouth was supposed to be and whispered: "Don't dare to breathe, Dinah. Don't make the weentiest bit of noise, for poor papa has one of his bad, nasty headaches, and you will be sent from the room in disgrace. Now mind." The child gravely put her hand upon her father's knee, and as he gave a guilty start, she asked: "Is it very, very bad, dear papa? Can your comfort charm it away?"

Andrew snatched the child to his breast, and covered her face with kisses. This little one was the only being in all the great world to whom he dare show his heart. He nestled his face in the thick flaxen curls on his darling's head. He was called a hard man by his fellow men. His servants knew him only as a relentless taskmaster, whose lightest word must be obeyed, but the child in his arms had never heard one harsh word from him, or seen other than a loving smile on her father's face when in his presence; and she gave him love for love. She passionately adored the stern, gloomy-faced man, whose heart opened at her bidding as a flower opens to the sun. "I told Dinah you was sick, and so she mustn't talk," said the child, patting her father's cheek, "and I think she deserves a merit card for her good behavior. She hasn't said a word."

The father started, and looked around the room, expecting to see a third person, but seeing nobody, he said: "And who may Dinah be, my angel?"

Mary raised the dilapidated doll. "Just as if you didn't know, Papa Willing, when you have kissed my ownest own Dinah lots of times. There, there, don't cry, baby, because papa has forgotten you. We shall not love him any more." Mary soothed the imaginary crying baby so tenderly, and with so sweet an air of gravity, much like Victoria when soothing Mary's childish grief, that Andrew laughed in spite of his gloomy thoughts, and caught Mary's face between his hands. "You are a little witch," he said, kissing the roguish face. You are putting on all that love. Dinah is only a bundle of rags. You don't love her."

"I truly do," replied Mary, clasping Dinah closer. "I love her best of all my children. She is so sweet."



"She must be," laughed Andrew. "Why she is simply disreputable. Where is the handsome Paris doll I gave you only last week?"

"Shut up in the clothes press. She put on airs before Dinah, just because she had real eyes and hair. I could not have that, you know, so into the clothes press she went, and she don't come out until she begs Dinah's pardon."

"And where is Miss Flora McFlimsey, who has been the reigning favorite for quite a while?" asked Andrew, amused at the prattle of his innocent child.

"Oh, I drowned her in the lake this morning. Tied a couple of stones to her legs, and then threw her in; and oh, papa, she sunk beautiful, and the cunningest little whirlpool came up where she dropped in."

"Horrors!" ejaculated Andrew in feigned amazement. "What a blood-thirsty little girl you are! Why, if I am permitted to ask, did you kill her?"

"I didn't kill her, papa, only just drowned her. I know the very spot. Dan can wade out and get her any time. I mean she shall stay there until she becomes a better child. She hooked all the raspberry jam from the preserve-closet, this morning."

"You don't tell me," said Andrew, seriously. "How did you discover that it was she?"

"Her face was covered with it, just actually 'smeared' as mamma says."

"Was there any jam on your face, chickie?"

"Mary looked up and caught the twinkle in her father's eye.

"Only just a little, where I happened to kiss Flora before she was washed."

"Oh, you are a sham," laughed Andrew, hugging the little maid close to his heart. "Have you told mamma about the jam?"

"Not yet, papa. I heard the groom telling the stable boy yesterday, 'never to do anything to-day that he could put off till to-morrow,' so I think I'll not tell mamma till to-morrow."

"What a philosopher I have here," said Andrew, drawing the flaxen curls through his fingers, but did you not misunderstand Teddy? Did he not say: 'Never put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day?'"



"He may have said that," replied Mary, nodding her small head, "but I like the other way a heap better."

"You are not alone, dear child," said Andrew, a gloom settling upon his face again. "Most people like to transpose the good old adage. I among them," he sighed.

Mary looked up quickly. She was quick to note these sudden changes in her father. I love you, papa. I do love you, best of anybody in all this world."

"Do you love me better than you love your mamma?" whispered Andrew longingly.

The child laid her cool cheek against the hot face of her father, and clasped him about the neck. "I love you first; then I love mamma; next I love Grandma Willing, who has gone to heaven, and then I love Dinah. Poor Dinah. Teddy threw her into a bucket of dirty water yesterday, and she doesn't look very clean, and then the mean thing laughed, so he did."

Oh, what sweet music was the prattle of this child to Andrew. Her baby love and caressing ways was all the heaven which he ever expected to enjoy. With his child in his arms he forgot for a time the sword of Damocles suspended by a hair, and which might fall at any moment and crush him. Few moments in Andrew Willing's life could justly be called happy ones, but when he looked back over the sin-laden years, he did not regret what he had done, except that the knowledge of his sin being known might tear from him the only two beings whom he loved. He looked after Mary as she ran from the room hugging the beloved Dinah. "Proclaim my sin," he murmured, "and by so doing become a jail-bird, shut away forever from my wife and child? Never! I may suffer all the tortures of the damned, but I will still keep my secret. I must go more into society, or Victoria, with her keen intuition, will surely discover something, and I must also fill the house with guests. It will, perhaps, serve to drive these demons away which so harass me."

He stepped out of the window, went down the veranda steps, and took the avenue leading to the lake. With bent head and eyes fixed moodily upon the ground, he walked along. He was envied by many people for his wide domains and apparent prosperity. Men who had met with adversity would turn to their



neighbors and say: "Talk of luck, why look at Andrew Willing. He is the luckiest dog going. Everything he touches turns to gold. His tobacco crops are always the finest. His negroes never sicken and die. Everything runs smoothly with him. Even his blind brother was conveniently killed in a railway accident, and Andrew profits again as usual by taking the fair widow along with the property." But if these men could have looked deep into this wretched man's heart; if they could have known the misery and tortures which every hour in the day he endured, then would their envy have been turned to pity, guilty though he might be. Andrew had been trying for ten years to stifle his conscience, which seemed to grow more active with advancing years, and would not be stilled. At the turn in the avenue he stopped, and looked back at the old gabled house in which he had spent so many happy hours; which also held the beings whom he adored, but alas, a home filled with grinning demons, whose devilish, hideous whisperings in his ears whenever he entered, were driving him to the verge of madness. He smote his breast remorsefully as his eyes wandered over the house, and rested for a moment on the highest gable which had once been the room of his father's favorite slave, but whose stained glass windows had been boarded up for over thirty years. "Peace, peace!" he cried. "Will I ever know peace again until I have made reparation to those I have wronged? And when I have done so, what then? A felon's cell or a suicide's grave will be all I shall have to look forward to. Oh, God! I cannot. I cannot. Let fate do her worst. I will keep my secret."



## CHAPTER II.

SHORTLY after this everything about "The Gables" seemed to take on new life. Andrew had bade Victoria make ready and issue invitations for a grand fête, which should be given on a scale of magnificence never equalled, and which should hold a week. Victoria was thunderstruck. This indeed was a new departure for her husband, who had tabooed all society for nearly ten years, and who now chose to plunge headlong as it were into gayeties to which he was wholly a stranger. It is no wonder that she looked apprehensively at him, and wondered if he had not suddenly taken leave of his senses, but knowing his dislike to being questioned she merely asked: "How many invitations shall I issue, Andrew?"

"As many as the house will hold without crowding, Victoria. We can accommodate nearly a hundred who may come from a distance. The lodge will room twenty more. We can erect a temporary barracks for the men who come unaccompanied by ladies, so I think with the neighboring gentry who will, of course return home at night, you can get out three hundred invitations. I will get the necessary lumber and have the men begin erecting whatever is needful at once. Will this please you, my love?"

"It certainly ought to," laughed Victoria. "Why, Andrew, the expense will be frightful."

"It will not exceed ten thousand dollars, Victoria, and I shall never miss so small a sum. Even if it is twice that amount I shall not grumble. We have received many pressing invitations from friends. It is but courtesy on our part to return them. See that there is an abundance of everything, dear wife. There will be plenty of time to order anything you wish from New York. You have my consent to go in as deeply as you may desire." And Victoria decided to obey her husband to the letter, and to make the fête one to be long remembered.



When it became known that "The Gables" was to be thrown open to the public. That everybody far and near had been invited by its master, the people could hardly believe the startling news. Very few had ever been inside the grand salon and reception-rooms, and those who had been so favored, had much to tell of their magnificence, and of the rare paintings and works of art with which the rooms were adorned. If Andrew was unpopular, Victoria was not, so there were very few regrets sent, and as the week approached, not a few anxious glances were cast at the threatening clouds which presaged bad weather; but the first day of the fête dawned cloudless, and before night every room in the spacious old house had been assigned to an occupant. Andrew laid aside his reserve, and proved himself to be a prince of entertainers. Victoria was amazed at this sudden transformation, and after seven years of married life saw her husband in an entirely different character, and also it was one which became him well. The first night was spent in all getting acquainted with one another, or in renewing old acquaintance, and in visiting the picture-gallery and other places of interest. The second day was to be devoted to the hunt. At night there was to be a hunt ball, and the grand ball-room was to be opened to the public for the first time in thirty-five years.

It was a merry party which assembled before the main entrance the morning of the hunt to say au revoir for a few hours to the hostess and those ladies who did not hunt. The gentlemen in their scarlet coats and buckskin breeches were bright bits of color among the more sombre riding-habits of the ladies, and Andrew, who sat his horse with a grace not equalled by any man present, noted the look of wifely pride on Victoria's face, as she waved him an adieu with Mary perched upon her shoulder. The lady riding by his side saw the tender expression on his face as he kissed his fingers to Victoria, and as their horses cantered slowly down the avenue, she said: "You have a most charming wife, Mr. Willing, and the little one is simply cherubic."

Andrew glanced at his companion. She was young and extremely beautiful. Rumor said that for three seasons she had been a reigning belle in New York and Baltimore society, and that, strange to relate, she cared



more for the society of middle-aged men than for that of men nearer her own age. Was she fishing for a compliment, thinking that Andrew, as scores of other men might have done, would at once begin a flirtation on the strength of the few words of praise bestowed upon his wife? All this flashed through Andrew's mind as he watched the blooming color, like the heart of a sea shell, come and go on the riant face of his fair guest. His dark, mournful eyes, whose sadness was their greatest charm, looked straight into the melting blue ones so near him while he said: "There is no woman on this earth to equal her, Miss Marchon. There never will be for me. Without her and the child, who is a part of us, my life would become a void. I should not care to live."

A slightly sarcastic smile curved the beautiful lips of his hearer. "Such devotion after nearly fifteen years of married life is truly commendable, Mr. Willing. So you never have desired to bask in the smiles of any other fair lady?"

Andrew saw the drift which the conversation was beginning to take. It was as he had thought. His beautiful guest was endeavoring to draw him into a perhaps harmless flirtation, but nevertheless, in his loyalty to Victoria, one which would be extremely distasteful to him. He resolved to at once nip this evident admiration of Miss Marchon for himself in the bud. He turned his horse and pointed with his whip to "The Gables," which in the next turn of the avenue would be lost to their view. "That house holds all I care for in the world. No woman, not even if she possessed the wiles of a Cleopatra, could turn my allegiance from the angel we have left behind. Other women when compared with her seem soulless, dead, devoid of all those graces which she alone possesses. My God, how I love her! It is something more than love. It is adoration, worship, an unquenchable fire, which, when I hold her in my arms burns with a fever heat. Ah, Miss Marchon, few women are loved with the devotion which I give Victoria. When I say that to save her one heart pang I would die for her, they are not idle words. They come from a heart whose every drop of blood flows for her."

He lowered his whip, and they rode on in silence. Andrew's dreamy, melancholy eyes had no further charm for Miss Marchon. He could not be drawn into a flirta-



tion, be it ever so mild, so, as they joined the rest of the party she gradually drew away from him, and attached herself to the side of the governor of the state, who was a widower, and a noted gallant. Her bright beauty soon captivated him, and before long she had given him her views of their host.

"He is a boor; a perfect numskull. He does not know enough to compliment any lady but his wife, and his ravings about her are ridiculous in the extreme."

"Do you mean to say that he has been in your charming society for a whole hour; has looked into those glorious eyes; has gazed upon those tempting lips; and yet has been so ungallant as not to have seemed to appreciate so much loveliness, and his own good fortune in being near it?" inquired the governor, bending from his saddle to touch lightly with his gloved hand the damask cheek of his companion.

"Even so," she replied, giving him a bewitching smile.

"Then he is indeed all that you have called him and a great deal more. He is wanting in courtesy, but then you must excuse him on the plea of his not having been in society of late. He has withdrawn from the world so completely since that dreadful accident to his brother, of which he was an eye-witness, and which for a time 'tis said unbalanced his mind so that he has acted strangely ever since. His wife was also his brother's, you no doubt know?"

"No, indeed. This is news," replied Miss Marchon, eagerly, woman-like, scenting a romance. "Do tell me all about it, dear governor. I know very little regarding them except what Mrs. Lewis, where I am visiting, has told me. She said that the Willings were people a little eccentric, but it would not do to slight them in any way, as they are immensely wealthy, and their ancestors were among the bluest blood of England's peers, and that the present Mrs. Willing is a titled English lady, who dropped her title upon marrying an American."

"All of which is very true," rejoined the governor, "but what I shall tell you borders on the romantic. Roger and Andrew Willing were twin brothers, and as unlike as you can imagine. I knew them both from childhood. Roger was one of the finest fellows I ever knew. Jolly, full of jokes, and always ready for a good



time. He had the handsomest blue eyes I ever saw, excepting, of course, these at my side."

Miss Marchon was one of the few women who can blush conveniently and at just the right time. A delicious rosy wave of color dyed her cheeks, and she laughingly tapped her admirer with her whip. "Go on, go on, you flatterer," she cried, "I am becoming deeply interested. I wish I might have known this Roger Willing whose picture you sketch so charmingly."

"You can see his portrait in the large gallery, Miss Marchon, taken in the heyday of his youth, but it does not do him justice. Well, as I was saying, he was a fellow beloved by everybody, and was so different from his twin brother, who was always as you see him now; moody, quiet, and sadly wanting in gallantry toward the fair sex, and if I am not mistaken, a little jealous of his more popular brother. Then when Roger was in his twenty-second year, just when life looked the fairest to him, he lost his eye-sight in a powder explosion during a Fourth of July celebration in New York."

"How very sad!" exclaimed Miss Marchon. "Those beautiful eyes! It must have been a serious affliction to him."

"It was; but he was a fellow who always looked on the bright side of everything, and you can imagine how surprised all society was, when it became known that only two months after his accident, he had been quietly married to Lady Victoria Vale, who was visiting his mother, and who had fallen violently in love with the invalid, and he with her."

"Oh, how romantic!" cried Miss Marchon, clapping her hands. "Just like a novel. Pray, hasten, governor."

"Yes, very romantic, but nevertheless a most unfortunate marriage. Lady Vale had higher views for her daughter, and was much displeased, so she left immediately for England, and never became reconciled even when her child was made a widow, and Rumor says she is not pleased with this second marriage, but I am digressing. It seemed as if nothing but ill-fortune followed this hasty bridal, for Andrew and his mother had some high words over a matter which no one has ever been able to discover, and the poor lady died that night in a paralytic fit."

"How dreadful! Why, it seems almost like a fatality, does it not, governor?"



“Almost, Miss Marchon; but Lady Victoria’s troubles were not over by any means, for less than five years after her marriage, Roger was killed in a railway accident and brought home a shapeless bit of flesh, to be buried in the family plot beside his mother, whose favorite he had always been, and from whom he was not long separated.”

Here Miss Marchon brushed a few pearly tears—which had conveniently appeared just at the right moment—from her blue eyes. “It is so affecting,” she said in excuse, as the governor watched her admiringly.

“It only shows what a tender little heart it has,” he said, riding close to her, and softly brushing her eyes with his own daintily monogrammed cambric.

“Is there more?” she inquired, putting up her face in the most innocent manner, and squeezing out still another tear which was tenderly taken care of by the devoted governor.

“I wish there was more so that I might still perform this pleasant task,” he said, as he lingered long over the last tear, “but there is nothing of any interest except that Andrew profited much by his brother’s death, and not three years after, married the widow who had seemed inconsolable at first. She is certainly a most beautiful woman, but she is no longer in the full bloom of youth, and not to be compared with the charmer by my side in whom her husband can see no beauty.”

“Oh, you are a naughty man,” cried Miss Marchon, you don’t mean a word you have said, and for punishment I shall ride on and join Miss Fairley, who has no companion.”

“Ah! do not be so cruel,” exclaimed the governor, catching her horse’s bridle. “The hunt will have no pleasures for me, if you desert me. Pray remove that glove that I may see your hand. Ah, it is still unfettered.” He caught the white hand and pressed it to his lips. “May I, dare I hope, that this little hand shall be mine for——”

Miss Marchon turned away her head, so that he should not see the smile of triumph on her lips. Here was a proposal worth accepting, but she would not make haste to jump at it too quickly. She must appear diffident, coy, and quite innocently maidenish, although she had passed the rubicon some time before and was



anything but an amateur in conducting love affairs to the desired point. His finishing words, however, brought her reverie to the ground with a thud, which *she* felt if no one else did, and she could have struck him in the face as he wound up with—"several dances at the ball to-night?"

For a moment she lost her head and came near bursting into tears. How glad she was that she had turned her head away. When she *did* look toward him her face was wreathed in smiles, and with a bewitching gesture, she replied: "As many dances as you wish dear governor. How can I refuse when asked in such a charming manner? But see, our party is already at the field. We are way in the rear. Come, let us hasten, or they will start without us.

And so ended the brief dream of Miss Marchon of some day becoming a governor's lady, for he never proposed, but rode away when the *fetê* was ended, and she never saw him more.

Andrew opened the ball that night with Miss Marchon, and her unwilling ears were obliged to listen, while he berated the custom which tabooed him from dancing the first figure with his wife. Victoria, feeling happier than at any time since her marriage, was dancing with the governor, and as Andrew watched the face so dear to him, and noted every changing mood from grave to gay, from laughter to serious thought, he did not regret the step he had taken in throwing open his doors to this "howling mob," as he called it, much as it was distasteful to him. He watched the governor as he bent in a most lover-like attitude over Victoria, and although he knew that Victoria was no flirt, yet the attention of any man toward his wife stirred something within him which if not exactly jealousy was very near akin to it. What man but himself had a right to clasp that slender waist, or press the exquisite figure of his loved one, perhaps with more tenderness than was at all necessary. He could hardly wait for the figure to be ended, so eager was he to join his wife, and with scarcely a word he led Miss Marchon to a seat, and crossed the room to where Victoria sat surrounded by a crowd of gallants.

She looked up with a bright smile as Andrew approached. "How charmingly Miss Marchon and you



dance together," she said, as he bent over her. "Is she not royally beautiful? I call her the most beautiful and the best dressed lady here."

"I had not thought of her beauty," replied Andrew, glancing at the sweet, serious face of Victoria, "and as for her costume I cannot tell you whether it be black or white. All women look alike to me save one, Victoria. That one I have deified. She stands a queen among her lesser satellites, and overshadows them all."

Victoria looked up into her husband's face. His eyes were full of slumbering passion, ready to burst into flame at a kind word from her. The other men had left them alone as Andrew began speaking to his wife, and somehow, as Victoria caught the fire in her husband's eyes, something which she had not felt before stirred within her. A tremor, delicious in its vagueness, shot through her veins, and she thought: "Can this be love which I feel coming to me? Love for a man whom I have said I hated?" She laid her fan upon his arm. "How much you do love me, Andrew? I wonder if there be another man in this ball-room who is saying such devoted words to his wife as I am hearing?"

"No," replied Andrew, "for no man loves his wife with the strength of passion which you inspire in me. Plenty are devoting themselves to the entertainment of other men's wives, leaving their own neglected, or to be led into a flirtation which belittles them in the eyes of serious people. The men are vain and careless of the reputation of those who should be the most cherished by them. The women are silly and frivolous, and so the world moves on, and this reminds me that I have a request to ask of you, my darling. Will you dance with nobody but me to-night? I do not care for any partner but your sweet self, and you may deem me very silly, but I cannot see you in the arms of any one of these men who are so inferior to you, without a jealous pang."

Victoria laughed. "What an idea, Andrew. Would you monopolize your wife at your own ball? What will people say?"

"I don't give a continental for what people may say. I want you for myself. What is your decision, sweetheart?"

"Of course I will do as you wish, Andrew. I don't



care to dance a very great deal. What I have promised I can no doubt get excused from."

"Then do. Are you promised for the next? Yes, I see you are. I will at once seek your partner and get a substitute in your place. Then I shall claim my rights. Do you know, sweet wife, that this will be our first dance together? Can you imagine how eager I am to try my step with your's?"

He pressed her hand to his lips and left her. She watched him treading his way among the crowd. Surely she had every reason to be proud of him, and she ought to love him. Such devotion was certainly worthy of a return. Then she thought of that other husband, asleep under the freshly cut flowers which Mary and herself had strewn upon his bed that morning. Every morning ere the sun was up she took Mary, and together they walked to the pines where Roger lay, and laid their tribute of affection over the quiet sleeper. Andrew knew of these early visits but he never objected as any other man might have done under the circumstances, and as she sat there thinking of his careful tenderness for her and their child; of his patient love which had grown instead of diminished during nearly eight years of married life; how he had borne without any outward signs of how it hurt him, her days of lamentations for Roger, when she had shut her door against everybody including her beloved child, and refused to be comforted. As she thought of all these things she saw her selfishness in many ways, and she resolved to gradually drop those early visits, and by so doing remove one thorn from Andrew's path, for it had been a thorn to him she well knew. This morbid love of her's for the dead who could never return. She welcomed him with a smile when he returned, and he saw that in her face which was new to him. He looked at her searchingly.

"Have you been communing with unseen spirits, Victoria?" he said, as he led her upon the floor, "your face is angelic."

"Yes," she replied, looking up to him with a strange light in her eyes. "I have seen a vision which I never expected to behold. A vision of love in which only you and I, and our child were the central figures."

He understood, and for a moment, strong man that he



was, he reeled under the exquisite meaning conveyed in her words. She was beginning to love him. She had put Roger away out of her thoughts. He placed his arm about her to begin the figure, and he pressed her to him with such passion as to crush the flowers at her bodice. "Don't, Andrew," she whispered, "you hurt me; besides, people about us are remarking your actions."

"The whole world may see and comment," he replied, as he strained her to him again. "I could shout it out from the house tops, I am so happy. I feel as if I were drunk, Victoria. Drunk with joy. Have I not waited for eight long weary years to hear the blessed words? Ah, if I had you alone, away from this gaping crowd, I would kneel before you and worship you as a divinity. My God! was ever woman so sweet as you? Was ever man so blessed as I? Will this ball ever come to an end?"

Indeed, Andrew in his ecstatic state of mind was nearer being a madman than a rational creature, and seemed to have thrown aside melancholy, and he entered into the sports of the ball with a zest equal to the youngest gallant there. Not until the revel was over, and he had sought his study for a few moments before retiring, as was his custom no matter how late the hour, did he remember the sword suspended by a single hair. Ah, yes, now it came back to him with cruel force after the sweet assurance held out to him by Victoria. With a maddening rush, all the simple events of the past ten years crowded upon his brain in a seething whirlpool, and beating his breast with his clenched hands, the strong man fell upon his knees, and for the first time in his life prayed God to forgive him his sins while he wept like a child. Ah, he was not without a conscience, which goaded and pricked him sharply. He had no need to wear a garment of hair next his flesh to remind him of a sin for which to do penance, and now—now that he knew Victoria was his; that in time she would give to him the sweet love for which he so craved, his sins looked more heinous than ever, yet he could not bring himself to confess them, for fear of losing both Victoria and his child; and he seemed to see written in letters of fire upon the study wall the words: "Be sure in time your sins will be discovered. Repent then, and confess."



"I cannot! I cannot!" cried the miserable man, in answer to those unspoken words, yet which were visible to *his* eye. "If my soul goes to torment I cannot confess. God help me!"



## CHAPTER III.

THE week of the fête ended as it had begun, with sunshine and cloudless skies. It had been pronounced simply perfect by everybody, who upon leaving, congratulated their host and hostess upon the successful termination of their more than delightful fête. Among themselves opinions were exchanged regarding the master and mistress of "the Five Gables." All agreed that Mrs. Willing had proved a charming hostess, with whom the most exacting could not find a grain of fault, but that Mr. Willing, although courtly in manner and very agreeable, was absurdly in love with his wife, so much so as to appear ridiculous in the eyes of his female visitors, who could have forgiven any other fault in their host more willingly, than this very unfashionable one of showing a preference for his own wife while other ladies were by.

Meanwhile affairs at "the Five Gables" resumed the even tenor of their way, which had been disturbed by the events of the past week. Andrew sunk into a chair as the last guest disappeared, and with a huge sigh of relief, took Mary upon his knee, who loudly wailed at seeing all her little playmates depart, and would not be comforted.

"Hush, hush, my darling," said Andrew, kissing the great tears coursing down the cheeks of the child. "Papa will get you anything you wish, only cease this crying, you will make yourself ill."

"But—but I—but I want Lilian to return," sobbed Mary. "She's a dear, and—and I love her, if she *did* stick pins into poor Dinah and call her a fright; and—and she has—she has such lovely long hair which I can pull when I get real mad at her."

"Ah!" laughed Andrew, "there is method in this violent grief. You have not been so unladylike as to pull Miss Lilian's hair, I hope?"

"Oh, heaps of times, papa. She liked it."

"No doubt," again laughed Andrew. "It must be an



exquisite sensation. What did Miss Lilian do while you were pulling her hair?"

"She bit me, here and here." Mary displayed two red marks, evidently made by four very sharp teeth.

"Upon my soul, chickie, your love-making was of a very tender nature. You pull her hair; she bites you, and still you lament her departure and wish her to return."

"Of course," replied Mary, sententiously.

"Why of course?" asked her father.

"Because of course I love her. She is the dearest girl I know. She hugs just be-yew-tiful."

Victoria came in at this moment and Andrew drew her to him. "I am glad we are alone once more," he said. "One such kick-up will do for a life time."

"But it has been very enjoyable, Andrew. Everybody has gone away delighted. I have heard so many pleasant things said about you, and it has made me glad. I feel very proud of my noble husband."

She placed her hand upon his head. He caught it and carried it to his lips. "I am rewarded," he said, looking lovingly into her eyes. "I would do it all over again to hear such sweet words from the lips I adore."

"But there is something I wish to ask you, Andrew. Run away to Chloe, my darling," she continued, stooping to kiss Mary, "mamma wishes to be alone with papa."

As Mary left the room she turned again to Andrew, a slight shade of annoyance on her face. "Is there a room in this house which I know nothing of, Andrew? A room in the western gable which I have always supposed was false?"

Andrew's face became ashen pale. His eyes sought the floor. He dared not look at Victoria. Wild thoughts flashed through his brain. Who had told her? How much did she know? With an effort he mastered his emotions, but he kept his eyes upon the floor. "Who has been filling you with silly tales, Victoria?"

"Mrs. Bradley said——"

"Ah! that busybody," exclaimed Andrew, tersely.

"Yes, Andrew, she seems to know more of the family history than your own wife. She, with some other ladies and myself, was standing in the west gallery this morning, when she said: 'Mrs. Willing, there is one room



you have not shown us, and I, for one, am dying to see it. I have often heard my father tell of its many lovely curios brought from foreign lands, and its beautiful occupant long since dead. He was a boon companion of your husband's father.'"

"I told Mrs. Bradley that I had no knowledge of any such room and that she must have been misinformed."

"Oh, no indeed," she replied. "It is in the western gable, and should lead right out from this gallery."

"Now I know you are mistaken," I answered. "That gable is false. There is no room such as you mention in the gable. Do you not see the solid wall all along this gallery? and the gable lies directly back of it."

"She smiled incredulously and looked at the other ladies as much as to say: 'She can tell us, but she won't.' I led the way from the gallery, and the subject was dropped; but I have come to you for information, Andrew. If there is any mystery about that gable you must know it, and I should hear from your lips instead of from those of a gossip."

As Victoria spoke Andrew's face underwent a gradual change, and as she finished he gravely took her on his knee. "Mrs. Bradley has laid bare our family skeleton," he said. "It is not pleasant to relate, but now that a busybody has partly enlightened you, it is well that you should know the truth instead of perhaps receiving a garbled account of it from a stranger. You have been told that my father died from an accidental pistol shot. So I was led to believe until my twenty-first year. Roger believed the same; then our mother told us of the gabled room, the knowledge of which was as much a surprise to us as it is now to you. We had always believed the gable to be false. My father when a young man, had fitted up in a most lavish style the western gable, making two elegant rooms of it, filling them with all the rare things which he could gather. Here he installed his favorite slave girl. After a time he went to England and married my mother. The very night of their return while he was showing my mother the house, as they went to ascend the stairs leading to the gabled room, his slave girl, smarting from her fancied wrongs, barred their progress and asked for freedom papers for herself and child. My father refused her, and straightway she shot him and then her-



self. Shortly after this Roger and I were born. My mother never spoke of her sorrow to anybody, but ordered every trace of the tragedy to be obliterated. No person ever entered the rooms after that except to board the windows. Everything was left as its unhappy occupant had stepped from it. The stairs were taken down and a solid wall built. My mother never spoke of it but once on our twenty-first birthday. Never again did I hear her allude to it in the faintest manner. That is the story, Victoria. Do you wonder at my silence regarding it? Is it a topic to be dwelt upon? A father's shame and dishonor; a mother's blighted life?"

"No, no, my husband. I would never have asked you to tell it had I known. Forgive me for unwittingly being the one to rake up these dead ashes of a buried past."

"There is nothing to forgive, dear wife. I think I feel better for the telling. Mrs. Bradley knows not as much as I have told you, for my mother succeeded in keeping the real facts to herself. The servants were all freed and given money enough to go far away, so there was no babbling. It was given out as an accident and so believed by most."

"What became of the child?" asked Victoria.

"That went with the rest. An old aunty and her husband, who were going to Raleigh to find their children who had been sold away from them, took the boy with them. We have never heard from them since. My mother gave them plenty of money and promised to send them more if they needed it, but they never applied for more. No doubt they are dead."

"No doubt," replied Victoria, looking dreamily out over the fair lands of which her husband was the sole possessor, "but I have a feeling, a presentiment, that some day you will hear from this Ishmael who really ought to receive some share of what was his father's."

Andrew smiled. "Don't let any such foolish fancies linger in your mind, dear wife. The laws of Virginia were made for just such cases as his. He could not claim so much as a stone from off this plantation."

"But, Andrew, laying all race prejudice aside, and speaking from your heart, tell me honestly, would you not feel guilty of keeping all? Is not a share of it your brother's?"



"Never," spoke Andrew decidedly. "Victoria, you are a queen among women. You are more intelligent than any woman I know, but on such questions allow me to be the judge. You certainly are not capable."

He arose and paced the room excitedly. "There is one person whose society I wish you to avoid Victoria, and that is Mrs. Bradley. When she calls here again treat her very ceremoniously, and please do not return her call. That woman gives me a creeping sensation whenever she come near me. She is a human snake. Leave her entirely alone, I beg of you. But for her this disagreeable conversation would not have occurred. Unpleasant things like these *must* not come up between us, my wife. They are sure to leave thoughts in the mind which cannot easily be forgotten. Am I right?" He stooped and kissed her.

"Yes, Andrew, you are always right. I will drop Mrs. Bradley from my calling-list, and you shall never hear me speak again of this skeleton in your family closet unless you first mention it. Will my doing so please you?"

"Most certainly, Victoria. We have never had a word of disagreement since our marriage. Do not let us begin now."

So the subject from that day was not again referred to by either Victoria or Andrew, but it cannot be said that neither thought of it afterward, for Victoria, although she had none but loyal thoughts for her husband, could not help her mind occasionally turning toward that mysterious western gable, in which were the beautifully decorated rooms which must now be in a state of utter decay after having been closed for so many years. Victoria was not without her full share of curiosity, and she often longed to speak with Andrew, and implore him to find some way of opening a passage to the western gable, so that they might visit those rooms and gaze upon the treasures supposed to be still there. Of course it was a sad story, but then nearly every old family had a skeleton of some kind in their closets, and now that the principal actors in this tragedy were long since mouldered into dust, what harm could be done by opening the rooms and making use of what must be the pleasantest gable of all the five. She re-



solved, when the proper time should present itself, to broach the subject to Andrew. He could only refuse.

After this conversation Andrew spent more of his time than he had ever done in his study. After breakfast he would repair to his study and give orders that he was not to be disturbed by anybody unless he himself should signify to the contrary, and often Victoria did not see him again until the luncheon hour. Then for a few hours, usually until dinner, he rode or drove with herself and Mary, and seemed for the time being to throw off the melancholy which was becoming more noticeable every day, and which Victoria gazed upon with alarm. Then shortly after dinner, when Victoria would have prized his society the most, he again repaired to his study, there to remain until the wee small hours, and it had become a regular nightly habit for him to have a repast served to him usually at midnight. Victoria had remonstrated with him until she had become weary. She told him that his health could not always remain perfect when subjected to such a strain; that he was growing aged far beyond his years; but he only laughed, and stopped her mouth with a kiss, and continued as before to immure himself within his den where Mary alone was admitted, and she not at all times, for she often knocked and even kicked at the closed door, and could get not so much as a word from her father who, when she told him hours after, would reply: "Papa cannot talk when he is writing or very busy, chickie."

"But you might just come to the door," persisted the child, "and say, 'Go away, Mary, papa can't see you just yet,' and not keep me banging at the door so long. I've listened at the keyhole many a time, and it's so awfully still it makes me afraid."

And at such times Andrew would take Mary on his knee, and bury his troubled face in the child's clustering curls. The anguish of his heart was plainly visible in his manner, but only his God and Mary was there to witness it, and although the child knew that there was something amiss, her childish mind could not fathom it. She only knew that her father was troubled, and in her baby fashion she comforted him, calling him "poor papa," and smoothing the heavy lines of care upon his forehead with soft, caressing fingers, which were as an angel's to Andrew's fevered, throbbing temples. To



him this child seemed nothing less than a celestial being, lent to him by a merciful God for a time, to sooth his tired frame, and who might be snatched from him in the twinkling of an eye; and he clasped his treasure to him with a passion born of his morbid fears, until the child begged to be released.

As the days grew into months Andrew's strange melancholy increased, as also his fancy that Mary must never be from his sight unless she were asleep, until Victoria feared for his reason. To her his behavior was as a tangled skein, of which she could find no end whereby she might begin to unravel. To all her questions his invariable reply was that he felt in the best of health; that his affairs in business were most satisfactory, and with this she was obliged to content herself, although it by no means reassured her. And too, his growing watchfulness over Mary alarmed Victoria. He demanded that her crib be placed closed beside his bed, and when Victoria surprised at the request asked the reason, he replied that of late he had been troubled with strange dreams, and that he thought he might rest better if he could awaken and lay his hand upon his child. So to humor him, Victoria had Mary's little bed removed from her room to that adjoining, and many nights after that when Andrew came from his study, he would bend over the sweet sleeper, touching softly the dainty cheek, or raising a tiny hand kiss each finger passionately, while tears which he did not strive to check, fell upon the innocent being whom he had sinned against beyond pardon, yet whom he loved as few children are beloved by their parents.



## CHAPTER IV.

At last nature turns if tried beyond her limit, snapped the frail cord which held Andrew's mind in soundness, and in a moment that which he had dreaded was upon him. He knew that he was insane.

One night he had repaired to his study as usual. The pressure in his head was something almost unendurable. He felt the cord snapping, and resolved ere it was too late, to write a letter to his wife. To write the confession so long deferred. He took his pen and endeavored to collect his thoughts. It was not difficult to inscribe "My Darling Wife" at the top of the page. Then he gazed at it dreamily. Something was wrong in those three words, but what was it? Where did the right begin, and where did it end? He read the words over and over again aloud, so that he might understand them more fully. Then he slowly drew his pen through them and wrote beneath "My Cherished Victoria." "She will know why I did it," he murmured. "Oh, yes, she will know." He lingered over the next words with a tender smile on his face. "No woman on this earth was ever loved with the worship, adoration, which I have lavished upon you. She knows that too," he continued, resting his head upon one hand. "Why do I tell her what she already knows so well? Ah, why?" He dropped the pen and seemed to be musing, then resuming, with a fierce wild light burning in his eyes, he wrote: "But I have also sinned grievously against you; so grievously, that I can never hope for pardon, therefore I have resolved to take my life, and so end it all."

He stopped and looked wildly about him. Where was the blessed instrument which in a moment would put him out of the torments and misery now assailing him. He opened several drawers in his desk, and at last found what he sought. He handled it lovingly. This little toy would give him that peace which had fled from him for so many years. He could lie down to a dream-



less sleep and waken—where? He did not care. The unknown and untried hereafter could be better borne than the tears and reproaches of Victoria. He had no dread of what he should meet. If he could only escape, only escape. He kissed the weapon which was so soon to bring him that coveted rest, and laid it down to finish his confession.

He had just taken up his pen when a loud tattoo was beat upon the wall nearest to where he was sitting. He arose with an air of resignation, as if what he was about to do was a duty most irksome to him, and opening the book-case door, placed his hand inside. Noiselessly the ponderous case rolled forward, disclosing an aperture rather larger than a common door. A powerful mulatto stepped into the study, and approached Andrew, gesticulating wildly. He placed his hands to his head, and then upon his chest, motioning toward the opening through which he had just entered.

“Is your master ill?” asked Andrew. The man nodded a quick assent. Andrew motioned him to follow, and went quickly up the stairs which could be plainly seen from the opening.

It was fully an hour ere he returned. He descended the stairs with a weary, lagging step, as if every motion of his limbs was an effort. His eyes had lost their wild, frenzied look, and seemed filled with a dull, heavy pain. The man was suffering deeply, and as he crawled to his chair beside the desk, and dropped into it like a log, one felt that whatever the crisis might be, it was now near at hand.

He folded his arms upon the desk and laid his tired head upon them. Just then Mary's voice was heard outside the door. “Papa, I am going to bed. I want my kiss.” He heard her but he could not answer. The latch was lifted, the door opened, and Mary entered. For the first time Andrew had forgotten to bolt the door. He was conscious of it. He heard Mary's step approaching, but some power held him fast in his chair, and he could not rise to close the book-case which still remained open. He heard the sweet, shrill voice in accents of pity say: “What is the matter, papa?” Is your naughty head bad again? Then, although he did not see, he felt that her wondering eyes had discovered the secret door. He heard her moving from him, and



he had the strength to raise his head, and watch Mary as she laboriously climbed the stairs. He listened until his ears could no longer distinguish her footsteps, and then buried his face—upon which despair and ruin was plainly written—once more in his arms. The sword had fallen, and the hair had been severed by his own child. He had not even the strength to lift the toy lying so near him, and so escape the wrath to come.

He heard Mary returning, and heard her running swiftly from the room. His benumbed brain could still determine what she was about to do. She had gone to tell her mother; but somehow, the thought did not worry him. He felt rather glad than otherways. Presently he heard voices. Mary was bringing Victoria. A wild thought flashed through his mind. With an effort he grasped the revolver. He would slay Victoria and the child as they entered, and then himself. At the same instant the toy fell from his nerveless fingers. Ah, no, he could not harm a hair of those so precious to him. Only himself. Only himself; but he did not feel equal to it, just now, and it would shock Victoria. He must wait. Again his head sunk upon his arms.

Victoria entered, her face white and fearful, with Mary clinging to her skirts. She glanced toward the aperture, and approached the wretched man. "Andrew, what is this Mary has been telling me? The child is nigh frightened out of her senses. She declares she has been up some hidden stairs, into rooms which she has never seen before, and there she saw a big negro standing by a bed in which an old man was sleeping. When the negro saw her, he ran at her as if to beat her, and the child came running to me. Is all this true? I can see the secret staircase for myself, but who is the old man, and what does all this mystery mean?"

There was no answer from the bowed figure.

Mary gently shook him. "I have had no share in your secrets, Andrew. Perhaps it were better if I had, but now I demand an answer. Have I your permission to ascend those stairs which I have already divined lead to the rooms in the western gable? Shall I see for myself what those rooms contain?"

"Yes, go!" hoarsely answered Andrew.

Victoria turned to leave him. He raised his head and caught her gown with his hand.



"Victoria!" he cried, "my angel! My more than life! Go, I dare not detain you. God has spoken to me. The time has now come; but my darling, keep what you shall see there a secret for Mary's sake, and remember that I did it all out of my great overpowering love for you." He kissed the hem of her gown and sank upon his knees as she wonderingly turned and ascended the stairs. His agonized eyes watched her disappear, and then his hand sought that thing which should give him peace. He groped for it. He had not the strength to reach it, and with a groan he fell forward upon his face.

Victoria had not a suspicion of what she was about to behold. Many strange wild thoughts floated through her mind as she ascended the stairs. The foremost one was that Andrew's father had not been killed, as had been believed, but that he was an imbecile perhaps, and so had been confined in these apartments for years. Yes, this must be it. She trembled violently as she reached the topmost stair, and stood gazing into the room beyond. It was vacant. No person was in sight, but scattered about the room were several toys such as very small children are amused with. A rattle box, a tin horn, and a drum. Victoria saw, and her eyes also noted the luxurious furnishings of the apartment, which was octagon in shape; and the walls were hung with very rare tapestries, which although faded, she knew were of immense value. How often she had wanted to investigate these rooms, but now that the opportunity had come, she felt an irresistible desire to turn and go back to Andrew, and be content with what he should tell her. A vague dread of what she might see in the further room, stayed her footsteps, and she turned to descend the stairs, but Mary who had become brave now that her mother was with her, pulled at Victoria's gown and cried: "Come mamma, into the other room, The negro won't dare to touch me now that you are with me. The old man in the bed looks so funny. Do come, mamma."

Victoria turned again, and with hesitating steps went toward the further room, whose door stood open. The violent trembling which had left her for a moment returned now and her limbs shook under her so that she was scarcely able to stand. She steadied herself by



clasping the door with her hands, while she gazed fascinated into that mysterious room, of which she had dreamed so often, but which was so entirely different from her wildest imaginings. As with the other room, this also was only lighted from the top by one single glass, which was lowered or raised at one's will, to admit both air and light. The floor was inlaid with different colored woods, over which rich rugs were strewn. The walls were hung with what had once been a bright yellow satin, but which had now faded to a dirty brown in streaks where the light had touched it. The chairs were all upholstered in rich stuffs whose beauty had long since disappeared, but the wonderful carvings still remained. They were the most beautiful Victoria thought that she had ever seen. A Chinese table of teak wood next caught her eye. It was a wonderful work of art. The legs which came together at the top were marvels of carving. The top of the table was inlaid about every two inches with solid ivory, in which were carved tiny figures of men and women, birds and flowers, and in fact everything known to the cunning Chinese artizan. Victoria bewildered, took in the surroundings with a rapid glance, and in much less time than it has taken to describe them.

"What a pity to let these rare things go to ruin when they might be put to good use," she thought as her eyes sought the bed. A mulatto stood at the bed-side, fanning the occupant vigorously. So engrossed was he that he did not heed Victoria's footsteps. She approached the bed with an awed manner which one is apt to use in a sick chamber.

"Is your patient ill?" she whispered, touching him upon the arm. He turned with a start, and gazed with a frightened look at her and the child. Then he seized her roughly by the arm and strove to push her from the room, but Victoria, who had by this time recovered her usual calm manner, resolved to end this long hidden mystery. She did not remember of ever having seen this negro before, but no doubt he was one of their own men. She turned haughtily upon him. "I am your mistress," she said, raising her hand. "Don't dare to touch me. Your master has given his consent to my coming here. Now, tell me who is this man, and if he is not ill why he remains so quiet?"



The man released her with a guttural sound, which made her start, and wildly moved his arms about, while he opened his mouth and pointed at it. To her horror she saw that he had no tongue.

"Great heavens!" she ejaculated, "what mystery is here?" Her tone was very tender as she added pityingly: "My poor man, I did not know of your affliction. Can you hear? Do you understand what I say?"

He nodded assent.

"Then, who is the man in that bed?"

He shook his head slowly.

"You do not know?" she asked in surprise. "How long has he been here? How long have you been here?"

Again the man shook his head, this time with an air of sadness most pitiful to Victoria.

"Poor fellow," she said, gently stroking his arm. Then, as a thought came to her, she added: "Can you read and write?" Again that mournful gesture more sad than tears.

Victoria turned in despair toward the bed. "Perhaps I can get a lucid answer from this person," she thought.

The mulatto approached the bed with a candle. As its rays fell upon the upturned face of the sleeper, Victoria started back with a cry of horror, snatched the candle from the man and placed it close to the sleeper's face.

"Roger!" she gasped. "Oh, my God! What do I see? Roger's living face, yet surrounded by snow-white hair? Am I going mad?" She reeled, and the mulatto caught the candle as it fell from her hand. Although everything seemed turning to darkness around her, Victoria did not faint. She felt a tightening grip at her heart, as if some one was slowly squeezing it between their hands. Her eyes could not leave the face of that old man lying upon the pillow. "Who was he? Not Roger, of course. How silly of her to imagine so for even one moment. Had she not seen Roger's body placed in the ground with her own eyes? Had she not insisted upon gazing at the horribly disfigured body of her beloved, although the sight had been one which she should never forget? Ah, no, this was not Roger. "Whoever he might be he was not her first beloved."

As she reasoned she felt calmer. "This was Roger's



father without a doubt. That was why the resemblance was so startling." Then she remembered that Roger's father had been of swarthier skin, like Andrew, with a dark, forbidding face, handsome, yet repelling. Mary had often told Victoria how like to his father Andrew was, and their pictures hanging side by side in the gallery demonstrated the fact. Again the cold perspiration gathered upon her body. She must discover this mystery or she should go mad. She turned to the mulatto who was stolidly regarding her. "What is this man's name? Can you tell me?"

He bowed his head.

"Is it—is it—" Victoria steadied herself by grasping his arm—"Roger?"

"The man smiled and nodded. Victoria thought she must have died and then returned to life, such a rush of emotion swept over her, such a flood of darkness, and then the light again. Ah, if she could only die, but she must ask one more question. Only one more. The answer to that would either confirm or deny her suspicions. With an imploring look on her white drawn face, as if she were begging him to say "No," she asked: "Is he blind?"

Again the man bowed his head, and with a cry which disturbed the sleeper, she threw herself upon the bed, and clasped him in her arms. This was her Roger alive, she knew not how, or by what means he had been restored to life, but it was surely he, the husband of her youth, the man whom she had loved so tenderly, and whose loss she still deeply mourned. Forgetting the wondering child by her side who was now beginning to cry; forgetting the wretched man below who had called her wife for so many years; forgetting everything but the sightless lover of her youth, she laid her cheek against that of the white-haired man, and called him by all the fond endearing names which once had made sweet music for his ears.

"Roger, my best beloved, my own husband, it is your Victoria who speaks to you; your sweet wife. Awaken, and unravel all this mystery. Do you not hear? Speak to me, call me your darling. Say anything, anything."

Her voice ended in a sob. She kissed his eyelids, his white hair, while the blessed tears fell unrestrainedly from her eyes. How good it seemed to be able to weep.



He had evidently awakened, for his eyelids were now open, and a puzzled expression was on his face.

"Adam," he called petulantly, "what is all this noise about? How do you suppose I can sleep? Tell all those people to go away? Oh, my head, my poor head. Its buzzing again, Adam, buz, buz, buzzing." He raised his hands and placed them to his temples.

Victoria softly kissed his forehead. "Roger, your loving wife, from whom you have been cruelly separated for so long, is here, right here by your side. Can you not understand what I am saying?"

"Go away," cried Roger, pushing her from him. "I want Adam." He began to whimper like a child. "I want Adam, I tell you."

Victoria shrank from him in horror. Was he mad? Ah, no, God would not have restored him to her only to have her find him an imbecile.

The mulatto now approached the bedside, and laid his hand upon the sick man's forehead, while he made a guttural humming sound in his throat. Roger's cries subsided, and his face resumed its former placid expression.

"That's a good Adam," he said, after a while. "A very good Adam. Such a kind Adam."

Victoria stood in silence gazing upon the mental wreck before her. A thousand thoughts flashed through her brain, most of them wild, vague, and full of terror. "Roger was alive, without a doubt, but that was all. In all things pertaining to the past he was as dead as though he were indeed within his grave; but the fact remained that he was her husband. Then what was the wretched man waiting for her below? She glanced at Mary, who had sobbed herself asleep upon the floor—"and what was her child, her innocent child who had never harmed anybody?" With the cry of a wounded tigress, she snatched up the child and swiftly descended the stairs, forgetful of Roger lying helpless in that other room. All her thoughts were centered on the man who had wrecked her life, and that of her child. "He *shall* confess," she whispered, pressing her lips to those of the sleeping child. "I will strangle him; yes, I will even commit murder, but he shall account to me for every day of that wretched time when I supposed Roger to be dead!"



She stepped into the study. Andrew lay on the spot where he had fallen. She placed Mary upon the couch and approached the prostrate figure. She touched it with her foot. Her face was hard and resolute. Not an atom of mercy would she show him. Was he not deserving of the most withering scorn? "Wretch!" she said, "I have discovered your secret. At last the truth has been made known. Get up and let me see your miserable guilty face. Come, confess your sin."

There was no answer, not even a muscle moved under her foot. She caught sight of the half-finished letter lying upon the desk, the revolver beside it. She divined at once what had been his intention. She caught up the letter and read it. The erased words, "My Darling Wife," touched her deeply. The significance of the erasure was fully understood by her. She groaned as she read it, but the next words brought the tears to her eyes. "No woman on this earth was ever loved with the worship and adoration, which I have lavished upon you." When she had finished reading the few remaining words Victoria knelt in tender pity beside the guilty man, whom she had just cause for hating. There was no hatred in her heart now. Nothing but sorrow, and a desire to shield and forgive his sin. She turned his face toward her. It was ashen pale and cold as one dead, and bore marks of great suffering. Indeed, for a moment she thought his soul had forever fled, and perhaps even now was being judged by Him who never errs.

"God is just," she murmured, as she placed her ear at his heart. "He will judge Andrew rightly. What right have I to pass judgment upon this man who has gone to meet his Maker?"

She started to her feet. She had felt just the least motion of the heart, but it had been enough to tell her that life still remained. She hastily rang the bell and bade the servant who answered it to send two men to her without delay, and to go himself for a physician.

When the men came she assisted them in getting Andrew to bed. He knew nothing, and she watched beside him, applying all sorts of restoratives, but without avail, until the doctor came. Andrew moaned incessantly, but further than that had shown no signs of consciousness. The doctor took several moments in



thoroughly examining his patient, while Victoria watched him breathlessly. Those few moments seemed like hours to her.

"This has been coming on him for some time," said the doctor at last. "His brain shows a severe mental strain. I would not like to express my opinion too hastily. To-morrow will determine it, but I fear, Mrs. Willing, that your husband will have an attack of brain fever, and it will be almost certain death, owing to the overworked state of the brain."

And so it proved. Andrew became violent through the night, and as morning dawned his ravings were such that Victoria had to be taken from the room prostrated. She had confided in the doctor as they watched beside the sick man, and he had at once shown her that now was not the time to disclose to the world the skeleton which had been concealed for so long. Andrew's severe illness could be a pretext for shutting the doors against all intruders, and with the help of two faithful nurses, they could still retain the secret until a more suitable time, and if Andrew should die, the doctor saw no use of ever unfolding a tale which could only bring upon the survivors shame and ridicule, and upon the name of the dead a tarnished reputation; whereas, keeping the secret could injure nobody. Together they read the few words which expressed so much of what was in Andrew's heart; which told of the boundless love for the woman whom he had called wife, and of the terrible remorse which haunted him day and night, and which, like an incurable disease, was slowly eating his life away.

"The man has suffered agonies," said the doctor, holding Andrew's hand firmly as he struggled and writhed with the pain. "If he were tortured with knives, or his body was put to the rack, he could not begin to suffer what he has undergone mentally during these few past years. The wonder is, how he has borne up so long. Most men would have succumbed long ere this." And then, as Andrew's ravings became more violent, they used their united strength in quieting him, until Victoria succumbed to a nervous fit, and the doctor ordered her to be taken from the room.

In a few hours she was again herself, and insisted upon returning to Andrew, who had become more quiet,



and seemed to rest contented while her hand was within his. The sick room being next to the study made deception more easy, as the doctor took the study for his retiring room, having promised Victoria not to leave her so long as Andrew lived, for they looked upon his death as a certainty. Here all the doctor's meals were sent, and much comment was indulged in by the servants in the kitchen over the enormous appetite of the "medicine man," as he was called.

"I tought Marse Andrew had a comin' appetite," said old Chloe, the cook, as she was one day arranging the doctor's dinner on a tray, "but golly me! I neber did see sech a gormad as dat yer medicine man. Nuffin eber comes back. Now, Marse Andrew, his midnight supper was de only one he car'd fer. He neber teched anythin' trough de day scasely, but de Lord save us! dis yer man ull eat us yout o' house an' home. Heyar yo' Sam, stir yer stumps lively now, an' flax roun' an' kill two more o' dem settin' chicks. We'll need em all fo' mawnin. Ya, ya, ya."

Aunt Chloe chuckled as she placed a plate of steaming hoe cake on the tray, beside a delicately broiled steak garnished with plenty of vegetables. "Don't spose dar's nigh 'nough," she added, thoughtfully, "bet a cookie he'll be sendin' down fer mo'; he gen'lally do. Heyar, you Pete, lazy bones, tak' dis up to Marse Doctor, un don' drap it on yo' big feet."

Pete took the tray, and with a flourish which bid fair to land the whole contents just where Aunt Chloe had admonished him not, he placed it on his head, laughing at her horrified gestures and loud exclamations.

"I is all hunkey, Aunt; don' you go for to cuttin' up like dat now. You'll git de runktums agin suah, hark wat I'se tellin' ye. Ef dat ar docta wants mo' stuff, he kin jes' ma'ch down an' git it fer hissself. Don' he tink I'se got nuffin else to do, 'cept wait on his bread basket? Well, I reckon I has. As fer totin' up and down star's mor'en fifty times, ter fetch tings ter stuff inter his big jaw, I'se done. Why don' he keep me dar till he's done? Den I could go arfter wat he wants, but no, he jes' sayes, 'Lay de cloth, Pete, dat's a good boy; and den yer kin detire.' In five minutes he wants mo' bread. In five minutes mo' he dequests mo' coffee, and den he only opens de do' a little teenty crack, jes' 'nough to git my



han' in. You'se hearn o' tape-worms, Aunt Clo? By gollys! I tinks dat yer man's got a dozen."

"Go long wid your tape-worms," cried Aunt Chloe, "de blessed dinner's all gettin' cold, while you'se shootin' off dat trap o' your'n. Spect I want ter stan' all day cookin' tings fer yer ter leave ston' cold, yer soft headed nigger? Start yer stumps now." She emphasized her remarks by vigorous whacks with the wet dish cloth in her hand, and Pete started on a trot, rattling the dishes together, while Aunt Chloe followed him with anxious eyes, expecting every moment to see a grand tumble of viands from their lofty perch; but a mysterious providence guarded his footsteps, and brought the tray safely to the study door, which was opened by the grave doctor, who took the tray from Pete, saying kindly: "You need not enter, my boy. I can arrange things myself very well without you."

Pete, not to be outdone in courtesy, bobbed his head and made an elaborate gesture with his arms, thereby causing the doctor to nearly lose his grasp of the tray. As it was, a cup and saucer balanced periously near the edge, and the doctor loosened his hold of the door to catch it. The door slowly swung open, and to Pete's utter astonishment he saw standing near the window, a tall, powerful mulatto whom he had never seen before, and who looked at him curiously. The doctor saw the whites of Pete's eyes grow until the pupils disappeared, and divining the cause he said, nodding at Adam: "You have not seen my new body servant before, Pete? He has just come to bring me some fresh linen," and a moment later Pete found himself in the hall looking at the closed door.

"Huh!" he grunted, "de docta tinks heself might cute, he do, but I tinks *I* knows a heap. I'll jes watch for massa body servant w'en he comes out, and scrap' quaintance with him. I'se had my 'spicions dat de docta nebber eat all dat stuff. I recon de body servant done help. Ya, ya."

But Pete, although he sat on the top stair and kept his eyes on the study door, never saw the body servant again much to his chagrin, for in some way he had begun to suspect that all was not as it should be behind the closed door.



## CHAPTER V.

Andrew's illness was of long duration, and Victoria had worn herself almost to a shadow in her efforts to nurse him without any help, except what the doctor and Adam, who was not always at liberty, could give her. She had plenty of time for serious thought while in the sick room. In fact she thought too much, and brought upon herself that most dreadful of all maladies, insomnia. Sometimes, after being all night beside Andrew, attending to the many wants which an invalid requires, she would seek her couch almost dead for the want of sleep, only to find as her head touched the pillow, that all desire for sleep had left her, and that her eyes would not remain closed ; while strange fancies and wild thoughts ran riot in her brain ; and she often rose from her pillow unrefreshed by not so much as a half hour's sleep. She did not tell the doctor, for every day, she thought, would be the last of her miserable feelings, and she would then find rest. She did not neglect the poor invalid in the Western gable. Many hours when she should have been resting were spent by her in trying to bring light to the darkened mind. Her bitterest tears were shed in that room where Adam was the only witness. She acknowledged to herself with sorrow and shame, that her wifely love for Roger was forever dead. That the man who ruined her life, held her heart by a cord which she would not break if she could. With every feeble throb of his pulse she felt her love grow stronger, and she knew that if he died her soul would follow his. Her love for Roger was in a great measure the same which she felt for Mary, a brooding motherly love, tender in the extreme, yet so different from the fiery flame which burned her whenever she heard Andrew calling her in tones of passionate entreaty, though the tongue which uttered them was inflamed by fever, and the man knew not what he said.

He had been ill three weeks, and in all that time not



a gleam of consciousness had shown in the fever-lighted eyes. No ray of light had come to the clouded brain. Victoria hung over him, watching his every motion, praying for returning reason, while in those three weeks he lived over the ten years of his sin laden life. Victoria listened, sometimes in tears, and again in keenest pity, while the tongue which had so faithfully guarded the stricken man's secret was now loosened, and ran on, and on unceasingly, babbling into the ears of the woman he had loved and wronged, all those things which he had so jealously kept from her.

He told of how in the early days of their meeting he had not cared for her, but after a time her loveliness dawned upon him, and grew, and grew, until from a trifling friendship it had developed into a passion which only death could quench. At such times he would clasp Victoria around the neck with almost the light of reason in his eyes, and calling her "mother," would tell her of the sweet fair English girl who had stolen his heart only to break it. Victoria's tears fell like rain on the hot purple lips of the sick man, as she listened to his ravings, but not a tear dimmed the brilliancy of the burning eyes fixed upon her's. He seemed to know that she wept, for he would say: "Don't cry, mother. You are too young and beautiful to weep, although your hair is white, and you love Roger better than you do me. I have become used to that, but mother," and here his voice would become shrill and discordant, and his features fierce and repellant, "Roger must not steal everything from me; he must leave my beautiful angel with the pure white wings for me to love. I will kill him else."

Then, perhaps, for a few moments, the burning eyes would droop only to be raised again, with a fiercer light gleaming in them, while he fought with imaginary demons, all bearing the form of Roger, who wanted to take from him his beautiful angel with the pure white wings, whose earthly name had been Victoria. Then for a time he lived over again that dreadful railroad accident, whereby Roger was supposed to have lost his life. With the cunningness of insanity, he would look up into Victoria's face and laughingly ask her "if she knew who Roger Willing was, and where he was buried. How I have longed to tell Victoria something," he would



say. "What a mockery her flowers seemed when laid upon the grave of an unknown, while Roger was sleeping—ah, where was he sleeping? If I tell you, you will tell her, and then I shall lose you, for you will go to Roger whom you always loved better than you did me, and who stole my angel, my beautiful angel with the pure white wings, but he has paid for it, paid for it dearly."

Victoria, who longed to know the real facts relating to Roger's escape from death, questioned the sick man all that she dared to, but his lips remained sealed until one day, as she was bending over him bathing his face, he caught her hands, and, holding them with a grip of iron, he shouted: "Ah! I know you at last. I have been trying to remember you for centuries. You are the shade of that beautiful bride from whose arms I tore the mangled remains of her husband, while not so much as a bruise was on her lovely face. Ah, ha! You have found me at last. Well, now that you have what are you going to do about it? He received Christian burial. I will take you to his grave, all covered with daisies, and you may find there, most any day, a fair woman—Oh, yes, far lovelier than you, beg pardon—who weeps and mourns for him who lies beneath. She thinks it is her husband. Only I know differently. *You* will never tell; you can't, because you are a shade, and shades never return to bother us; but then, if they don't, how the deuce did you get here? Ah! I see. I have become a shade; that explains it. Oh, of course, very considerate of you to meet me to ask after the welfare of your beloved. Did I not tell you he was well taken care of, while you were given a pauper's burial? Nobody ever took the pains to hunt *you* up. Now go away and don't bother me. I've got no more to tell you." Then, exhausted, he would sink back upon the pillow, gasping for breath.

Perhaps it was his weakness which appealed to Victoria's womanly heart. Perhaps it was the strong love which even in his most agonizing moments of pain, he never lost for "his angel." In all those weary weeks he never called for Victoria; he always spoke of her as if she had gone away or was indeed an angel. To him Victoria was his mother, and her touch soothed him when nothing else would, and many times he pleaded



with her to intercede with Victoria in his behalf. "She knows I adore her," he would cry. "Mother, she is angry with me. I cannot bear those reproachful eyes forever fixed upon me. Tell her I did it because I loved her so. Tell her nothing, however bad it might have been, that she could ever do, would have turned my love from her. Ask her to forgive. I know she will; she always had such a tender little heart. Tell her I thought it no sin at first, because it brought her within my arms. My arms which are empty now. Ask her if she remembers the night of the ball, when she told me that she loved me, or was beginning to love me. T'was then I realized that heaven I had never expected to reach. Oh, God, that night. Will it ever come back to me?"

Victoria buried her head in the pillow. "My heart is breaking," she cried, as the doctor lifted her wasted form as if it had been a child. "Doctor, give me something to make me sleep. I have not slept for four days or nights. If I might sleep to never waken more, how happy I should be."

"Think of your child, Mrs. Willing," replied the doctor. "Think of all those who are leaning upon you; who would be lost without you. You have proven yourself one of a thousand in this severe trial. Be brave a little while longer. Why did you not tell me of this insomnia? Of course I will give you an opiate, and when you shall awaken, life will have put on an entirely different hue, and there will also be a change in Andrew for better or for worse. See, he sleeps. It will be either death or life. Let us pray to God now, this instant. Which shall it be?"

Victoria, almost distracted by the fiery trial which she was undergoing, looked at the sleeper with eyes of love. Then, raising those eyes to heaven, she cried: "Death! Merciful Father, in Thine infinite pity, Thou who knowest the frailties of the human heart and who chastises only by love, let it be death which shall come to him who holds my heart and will not let it go, for if it be life, what will become of us, who are so weak?"

The doctor raised her from her knees and bore her to a couch. "God moves in a mysterious way," he said, gently stroking the beating veins in her temples.



"He does not always answer our prayers direct. Come, say with me the Lord's Prayer. It covers everything which we need. Will you say it?"

"Yes," replied Victoria, her eyes still upon the sleeping man; and with her hands clasped within those of her untiring, faithful friend, she repeated with him the simple yet restful prayer, which has brought peace to so many aching hearts. As the doctor repeated "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven," Victoria's voice faltered, and, bowing her head upon the physician's arm, she cried: "No, no, I cannot say that. It is *my* will that I wish, not *His*. How *can* I say it, when my heart cries all the time for death, oblivion, forgetfulness? God's will may be to have him live. What, then, must be our future? Ah, no, I cannot, dare not say what my heart rebels against. Think you that I have the strength to live apart from him who draws me by a power I cannot resist? Ah, no, dear friend; the spirit may be ever so willing, but the flesh is woefully weak. There is no safety for either of us but in death."

For a time the doctor allowed her to indulge in the passionate grief, which shook her frail form as a mighty storm sways a tender sapling. Then, wetting a cloth with a strong æsthetic, he laid it over her face, and presently her sobs ceased and she lay quiet. Removing the cloth, he took her in his arms as he would a tired child, and laid her beside Andrew. "If she awakens, she will remain quiet, knowing that the least move may prove fatal to the invalid," he said, watching the pale, worn face. "Poor child! Her burden may become greater than she can bear, for I notice a change in Andrew. I think he will live."

It was hours before a single motion from either disturbed the physician's reverie. Then Andrew, with a deep sigh, opened his eyes. They encountered the doctor's. He approached the bed, placing his finger upon his lips to enjoin silence, but Andrew could not have even whispered. Keeping his eyes open was an exertion, and he soon closed them; but in those few seconds the doctor had seen in the questioning eyes the light of returning reason, and with a murmured "thank God," he set about preparing a cordial against the time when it should be needed, for now he knew that An-



drew had passed the crisis, and with good care would live.

All physicians take a certain professional pride in having been instrumental in saving a patient for whom they have labored, expecting nothing but death. So it was with this good doctor. It had seemed a hopeless case from the beginning. A case which held no promise of a reward for his untiring efforts, and so, perhaps, his joy was greater because this man's life had been given to him in answer to his prayer. For he had prayed that Andrew might live, just as fervently as Victoria prayed that he might die. He foresaw a serious complication of affairs, if Andrew should die. Much more serious than if he lived, especially so for little Mary, upon whose innocent head would descend her father's sin. When Victoria should awaken refreshed in mind and body, he would present all these things to her in a light which her clear common sense must acknowledge as being the only way out of this almost insurmountable difficulty. A way in which the family name could be saved from disgrace; in which the dying man upstairs (for his days were numbered) could peacefully pass away; in which the little child who had done no wrong could be shielded from the world's cruel tongue, which stabs unmercifully from the back, whilst exhibiting a smiling face.

All this the kind friend determined should Victoria be made to see. As for himself when his duty should have been done; when there remained no more for him to do, he would again take up the monotonous routine of a country physician's life; not without a scar upon his heart, however. These few weeks of close companionship with a woman superior in all things to any he had ever known, had been dangerous in the extreme, and he was conscious of it. He was a confirmed bachelor of fifty years. His boast among his own sex was, that he had never been in love, nor had he ever seen the woman who could tempt him to change his happy state, for what he was sure would be a most unhappy one. He had been the Willing's family physician for eighteen years. He had been present at every death, at every birth, within that time. He had been a trusted and tried friend of the family outside his professional capacity. He had looked upon Victoria al-



most as a father might have done, but he found as the days went by, that he had more than a father's love for the sad, sweet-faced woman, who bore her burdens so uncomplainingly, and who was living up to her faith so far as the light had been shown her.

Unlike most professional men the doctor was a thorough Christian. He carried his faith into his work, not obtrusively; no person could say that of him. Yet when called to a patient who had never employed him before, that patient knew ere the doctor left the room that he was a servant of the Lord. So when he saw that Victoria was becoming every day more dear to him, he did not flee from her presence as a weaker man might have done. He simply stated the case to his Heavenly Father, as a child confesses a fault to an earthly parent, and trusting in the Divine guidance he went about his duties as before, knowing full well that without him the frail bark would founder. That here was he needed, and here he must remain, guiding the rudder until all danger should be passed.

Victoria saw nothing of all this. To her this man was only their family physician in whom she had been obliged to confide. A man deserving of her confidence, and one who would not abuse it. Knowing his aversion to all women she would not have believed her own ears if he had knelt before her and poured out all that was in his heart. She would have said: "I have at last gone mad."

There were times when Victoria nearly succumbed under the weight of her manifold duties. Then it was that the doctor was obliged to put a strong curb upon himself. He longed to take her in his arms tenderly, soothingly, and stroke the aching brow until he should bring rest to her whom he loved, but he dared not, for he knew she would not understand such love as he felt for her; that it would only frighten her. To him this was the sweetest time in all his life, and he knew that there was no sin in such love as he bore Victoria. He did not desire her for himself. True, if she had been free, he would have striven desperately to win her, but she was not and never would be while he lived, and he did not wish it otherwise. He longed for her happiness; to see her gay and smiling, as he had once known her in her early married life with Roger. She had passed



through so many fiery trials that they had left their imprint on her face, and she must bear their marks through life, but he would shield her from all further care so far as it lay in his power. The cruel darts of malicious tongues should never strike her, if he could prevent it.

Such had been his thoughts as he sat beside the couch waiting for the crisis which meant so much to all three of them. Now the tide had turned. Andrew would live, and he must, as the only friend who knew his secret, counsel and advise him. However painful, it was a duty from which he must not shrink, and for Victoria's sake he would take upon himself the secret of "The House of Five Gables," and keep it from the curious, gaping world.

A second time Andrew opened his eyes and gazed questioningly at the doctor. Then, feebly turning his head he saw Victoria's white, wan face on the pillow beside him. When he looked again toward the doctor there was a smile of perfect peace upon his face. His lips moved. The doctor bent to catch the words which came feebly, hesitatingly.

"She knows all, and yet she has not left me. How great is woman's forbearance. I have been ill?"

The doctor nodded. "Yes, very ill, Andrew, and unless you keep very quiet and husband what strength you have remaining, you cannot recover. Take this cordial and compose yourself for another sleep. Then when you waken, I will answer all the questions you choose to ask."

"Just one more question, doctor. How is my brother?"

"There is no change nor will there ever be. He will remain in this state until he dies, which is only a question of time. His days are numbered."

Andrew turned his eyes again upon Victoria, and tried to raise his hand, but it fell helpless upon the coverlet. He looked wistfully at the doctor. "I am so weak," he whispered. "Take her hand and put it within mine. I want to touch her; to know that she is flesh and blood. She looks so pale, and wan; so like death, and it has been all for me; all for me."

The doctor did as Andrew desired, and with a sigh of



content, the invalid closed his eyes with Victoria's hand clasped in his own.

An hour later Victoria awoke. Adam was sitting beside the bed fanning Andrew, who lay sleeping with a faint smile on his face, and with Victoria's hand still within his. She gently drew it away and rose from the couch. Something in Andrew's appearance told her that he had awakened in his right mind. The soft, rosy flush on his cheeks, which had long been so colorless, bespoke returning life. Although she had prayed that he might die, a rush of gladness that God had not seen fit to answer her prayer filled her heart. "After all, how could she bear to have him put away from her sight forever, and, too, there was Mary, who loved her father so passionately, that if he died it might seriously affect the child, who hung about the door all day, refusing to be enticed out to play, and eating scarcely enough to keep her alive." Once she had been admitted to the sick-room, but her violent sobs at seeing her father's swollen lips and colorless face, disturbed the sick man, and she was banished, but she knew that her father was still there, and nothing could induce her to leave the door, where Victoria found her as she went out. She took the child in her arms and carried her into the study where the doctor lay sleeping. "Papa will live, my darling," she sobbed, burying her face in the clustering curls. "Papa will live. To-morrow you shall see him, and tell him how happy you are that he again knows you."

The doctor arose as he heard Victoria's voice and came to her. She looked up with a smile more cheerful than any he had seen on her face for many a day. "You know that he will live?" she asked.

"Yes, Mrs. Willing, he awakened while you slept. He asked for his brother, and then he wanted your hand in his, when he fell into a life-giving sleep, which will do him more good than all my medicines. Good nursing and strengthening food is all he requires from this on. I think I may safely return home to-night. I will come early in the morning to see how he is progressing."

"Ah! do not leave me," she said, clasping his arm. "What shall I do without your ever ready hand to assist me? Oh, my friend, you will never know what a comfort you have been to me in this my sorrow. No words



can express to you what is in my heart. But for your thoughtful care and Christian example, I must have died. God bless and keep you."

The physician bowed his head. Such sweet praise from the lips of the woman who was so dear to him, was balm to the scarred heart beating now so furiously. He raised her hand to his lips. "My dear Mrs. Willing," he said, as calmly as if she were a perfect stranger, and he a man of stone. No sign of tumult within him showed upon his tranquil face. "My dear Mrs. Willing, all that I have done any compassionate man would also do. I deserve no thanks for doing my duty. I could not have saved that frail life if God had not willed it so. To Him belongs the praise." He took Mary in his arms, and kissed her many times. It was a blessed relief to be able to ease his aching heart on the face of this innocent child. Her child.

"You hug almost as hard as papa," she said, patting his cheeks caressingly. "Do you love me a heap?"

"Yes, heaps and heaps," laughed the doctor. "What will you take for one of these curls. I would like to take it away with me and wear it next my heart."

"Couldn't spare the weentiest bit of a one," she answered, shaking her head sagely. "My papa owns all of them. He says every hair on my head is more precious to him than all his gold. When he gets well enough to talk to me, I'll ask him if you may have one. I could not let you have it else, but I'll give you all the hair on Flora McFlimsey's head. It's a heap prettier than mine, and stays put a heap longer. I haven't any bald-headed children. I reckon I'd like one for a change."

The doctor laughed. "I should feel highly honored to receive Miss Flora's hair, and you are very generous to offer it, but it is yours I wish. If I can't have it I don't want any."

"Oh!" said Mary, meditatively, as she laid her head upon his breast, and played with the buttons on his coat, "that's it, is it? I reckon you'll have to go without. Why don't you buy a little girl with hair just like mine? Then you'd have heaps of curls instead of a teeny one."

"Ah, but the trouble is, there are no little girls to buy."



Mary's mouth made a round O, while she looked at the doctor and then at Victoria, who was amusedly listening. "I—I am afraid you don't always speak the truth," she said, after a pause, "and mamma says that's extremely naughty. You carried a baby to Myrtle Bradley's house the other day, and one to Dorothy Lane's. Why didn't you keep one for yourself?"

"But they were both boys, Mary, and boys, you know, don't have such nice hair as girls."

"Oh!" again said Mary. Then, after a pause, she drew the doctor's ear close to her rosebud mouth and whispered confidentially: "Don't let mamma hear, but do you know, every night when I go to bed, I thank God that you did not bring a boy to mamma instead of me. I should not like to have been born a boy."

The doctor roared, and looked at Victoria, who had heard the loud whisper, but his face quickly sobered as he saw her agitation.

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings," she quoted. "Oh! God, I too, thank thee for this precious gift, which was not born a boy, who might have lived to curse the author of his being." She rose hurriedly and left the room, while the doctor gazed after her with a deep sorrow in his eyes.



## CHAPTER VI.

THE next few days were quiet dreamy ones to the invalid. Not much conversation was allowed in his room, and he did not seem inclined to talk. To watch Victoria as she glided silently about performing the usual duties, was happiness enough for him. There was a world of enduring patient love in his eyes, as they followed her every motion. His thoughts were always of her. "Was there ever woman so noble, so forgiving? If he had loved her in the days gone by, what was *this* feeling which now thrilled him whenever she laved his face or touched his hand? It was as if the hand of an angel had been laid upon him." He felt purified, exhilarated, free from all sin. Her calm spirituelle face soothed and quieted him. He longed to utter what was in his mind; to tell her how sanctified she had become to him; to pray to her as a Catholic prays to his patron saint. Knowing his sin, knowing how he had deceived her, she did not turn from him in scorn and loathing, as any other woman would have done, but true to herself, compassionate, forgiving, she had stayed by him tenderly nursing him back to health and strength. He knew that to her never-ceasing care he owed his life, but not for a moment was he vain enough to attribute it to love for him. The love which was just springing up in her heart like a tender flower, must have been ruthlessly crushed when she knew of his base deception which had continued for so many years, and now that she knew Roger was living, her love would again return to him and rightfully, Andrew did not rebel at the thought. There could never be any more hatred for Roger in his heart. The noble conduct of this more than noble woman had forever dispelled it. Without a murmur he would resign her, content in knowing that she had forgiven him; content to worship her from afar, living over again the fragrant past, taking no hopes for the future for he could see none. The doctor had said that Roger's days were numbered, but what of that, Victoria



would never return to him who had ruined her life. Ah, no, her forbearance could not be expected to extend that far, and somehow the thought did not affect him, as it would have done before this sickness. His love for Victoria was purer, of a higher order than before. She seemed no longer a mortal but a being most celestial, and he would not have been at all surprised had he seen wings suddenly appear upon her form and Victoria soaring away into space far, far beyond his gaze.

Victoria was conscious of Andrew's eyes following her every motion, and she strove to curb the strong passion which at times threatened to master her. She longed to cast herself beside him; to confess the overpowering influence which drew her to him despite her will; to tell him that now, God pity her, she loved him with a strength, a passion, which was as deep as his own, and that the man upstairs, who should be all in all to her, was nothing, nothing, nor ever would be. She cared for him less than she cared for Mary, and in the same maternal way; but for the man who had sinned so grievously against her and her child; who had not hesitated to commit a crime which if known meant years of imprisonment; for this man, guilty though he might be, she was willing to suffer anything, rather than be separated from him. And why *was* it so? That she was unable to explain even to herself. She only knew that so it was, incredible as it might seem to anybody who had never been tempted in like manner. To save the man she loved she resolved to keep Roger in imprisonment, whatever might be the cost, and to let things go on as before. She felt a satisfaction in the thought that in so doing her guilt would be equal to Andrew's. Therefore one could not reproach the other.

Few words had passed between them. Once when she had been feeding to him some gruel, he had kissed her hand and murmured: "My angel," in tones which stirred every fiber in her heart, and set them quivering. She had not answered him. She could not. If she had, such a torrent of burning words would have escaped her, that in his weak state might have proved disastrous. To kill him now would be to kill herself, so she veiled her eyes when obliged to approach him, and her calm, low voice, and rather cold features, told not of the storm-tossed soul within the fragile frame.



Mary had been allowed in for a few moments each day, but her incessant chattering wearied Andrew. He loved his child. The sight of her glad face brought him new life. Her kisses were like strong wine, yet in a short time he tired of her, and was glad when the door closed upon her, and he was once more left alone with his waking dreams, wherein Victoria, "his angel," was always the central figure.

Despite Victoria's entreaties the doctor had gone back to his cheerless bachelor quarters which he shared with a younger colleague who had taken the doctor's patients during Andrew's illness. Back to a landlady who resembled a feather pillow tied tightly around the middle; a landlady who wore a false front many shades darker than the back hair; who sniffed when she poured his tea, sniffed when she passed him an article of food, and who had a very annoying habit of inquiring after each and every patient by name, and of enumerating their several ailments for the benefit of the other boarders who did not know, and who did not care to know, but who bore the infliction with martyr-like stoicism. From what source she gathered her information was a mystery to the doctor who was most reticent in all things pertaining to his profession. He would have left her establishment long ago only it was "Hobson's choice" with him. There was none other. She was sole monarch over the stomachs of all the homeless men in Fort Henry, and if any dared to grumble at the food placed before him she could afford to toss her head and tell him, "if he didn't like it he knew what he could do," which was just what the hapless individual did not know. The doctor never grumbled over the culinary arrangements. He was never known to perpetrate but one joke on the good woman, which, although hugely enjoyed by those who heard it, fell far short of the mark shot at.

One day the doctor came to his dinner with a ravenous appetite. He had been in the saddle since day-break without a mouthful. A brown substance was set before him which he eyed rather suspiciously. At last hunger conquered suspicion, and he took a mouthful. He chewed and chewed, and finally with a gulp which brought the tears to his eyes, he swallowed it. The few who had suffered before him were watching silently.



"What do you call this dish?" he gravely asked his landlady.

"Fried sole," she replied, busy with the cups and saucers.

"Ah?" he exclaimed, quickly. "What shoemaker do you deal with? I must know him."

A general laugh followed his query. Only the landlady maintained her gravity. She had heard nothing to laugh at. "I most generally trade at the sign of the boot," she said, casting a withering look around the table, but which changed to a smile as she looked at the doctor. "I never had cause to complain, although I will say that my last congress gaiters ain't goin' to wear near so good as t'others, but on the whole I'd advise you to go there, doctor. They'll treat you well, especially if you have corns."

The doctor looked helplessly at his companions and then collapsed. His first and only joke had been a failure. "Requiescat in pace," he murmured, which quotation caused another outbreak among the diners, but they were quickly frowned down by the austere mistress. She had no affinity between fried soles and her shoemaker, but she *did* look with approving eyes at the doctor, who had noticed her feet enough to ask what shoemaker she employed. He was a dear man, and near her own age; could it be possible he was thinking of matrimony, and with her? Well, if so, he should be rewarded. She had saved a tidy little sum since Samuel died," (Samuel being the dear departed, of course), "and it should be all his, every cent. He should see how generous she could be. The dear, good man."

After this she watched over his going out and coming in with almost wisely solicitude. She managed by hook or by crook to know who were his patients, and what their ailments. It necessitated a reckless expenditure of coppers among the street gamin, but it might pay her in the end, so she thought. He could not very well ignore her, when he found how anxiously she studied his every interest. She even went so far as to purloin several medical works from his study in his absence, so as to read up against the time when she might have to entertain him whole evenings in her parlor, which until now had been sacred to Sundays and "other high days," as she called them. No boarder's profane foot had ever



desecrated the jaundiced carpet, whose flaring green and yellow figures, if made in our day and time, would have driven Oscar Wilde much wilder. The stiff, horse-hair chairs were miracles in their way. It required courage and a certain amount of finesse on the part of a would-be occupant, ere he dared entrust himself to their embrace—a cold, slippery embrace, not at all reassuring. Even a huge oil painting of the dear, departed Samuel, taken in Highland costume, could not lend a festive aspect to the room. In all things but the carpet it was decidedly funereal. Into this “cheerful” retreat she ushered the doctor the night of his return from “The Five Gables.” She had literally killed the fatted calf in honor of his return. The supper-table groaned beneath the unwonted weight of so many delicacies heaped upon it. The widow was resplendent in a new false front which *curled*. She had given several shin-plasters for those curls, “something quite new,” the shopkeeper told her, “and recently adopted by the Queen of England.” It was not without some misgivings that she indulged in this reckless piece of extravagance, but there was much at stake. Those curls might be the means of a proposal. “Mrs. Dr. Arthur Harrison.” The name was magical. Without so much as a sigh she counted out the necessary amount, and the curls were hers.

She made the chore boy saw a new board for her stays, which she laced until every breath she drew was a sigh. She could not even sniff without a pang in her bosom, and after she was dressed she ordered the maid of all work to go around her with a tape line. She smiled, although it was a mighty effort, when she heard the girl exclaim: “Thirty-four inches, Mistress Jackson; that’s two inches less than last week, and three inches less than the week before.” What a sacrifice was she offering upon the altar of her love. She met the doctor with a fat smile, which she meant should be captivating, but which only served to make her ridiculous. The doctor thought as he went slowly to his study: “I wonder what has come over the old lass. She seems a good deal spruced up. It must be that she is on the war path for a successor to the dear departed. Well I wish her all the good fortune that may attend her. Fortune is a fickle jade.”



He did not dream that all these demonstrations were in honor of his modest self.

The boarders looked at one another as their landlady with a sweet smile, asked the doctor to accompany her to the parlor as they left the table. What was about to happen? Were the skies going to fall? Were their eyes to behold that sacred veil, i. e.—the door—lifted so that at last they might gaze on what lay beyond? Oh, no, the landlady had other plans. As the doctor could hardly refuse her invitation this first evening of his return, he acquiesced with as good grace as possible.

Taking his arm and giggling like a girl of sixteen, she swept him out of the door on to the veranda, and unlocking the big green door, ushered him with an awed manner into the sacred room. The semi-twilight which struggled through the drawn shades, was embarrassing in the extreme to the doctor, who was all at sea as to his surroundings. He dared not advance a step in any direction, for huge shapes loomed up before him, the likeness of which he could only imagine. Vague feelings of mistrust as to his landlady's designs began to steal upon him. He wished he had not come. She still held his arm, and she now gave it a little squeeze which made him feel chilly. "Horrors! what was this dreadful woman about to say or do?" He resolved to forestall her by saying: "Madam, take pity on my youth and innocence. I am an orphan, with neither father or mother, and two hundred miles from home," but ere he could muster his courage she had left him, and in a moment he heard a flint struck, and she came toward him bearing a candelabra which she set upon a table. He could now see where he was, and as she said: "Be seated, doctor," he gingerly consigned himself to one of the horsehair chairs, which looked to him like an evil spirit in disguise.

She seated herself in a similar chair, which she drew perilously near the doctor. He would have liked to move away, but he felt a slipperyness which warned him that any unguarded move might send him upon the floor. He raised his eyes to where hung the portrait of the dear departed. Here, at least, was a safe subject for conversation.

"A fine-looking man," he said, nodding at the sepulchral face of Samuel.



"Ah, now, you be talking," replied the widow, with a loud sniff, which caused her untold agony in the region of her waist. "Oh, he was a man what *was* a man, was that one. Never a word of fault about anything, just that even tempered was he. Give him his ale and a pipe, and you'd never know he was in the house. He was Scotch, you know."

"I perceive that," said the doctor, who felt in duty bound to say something.

"Yes," continued the widow, "that picture I had copied. A man came along and stopped with me two weeks. He never paid me any board money. He hadn't any money, so he said as how he would paint my Samuel's picter. It's as nateral as life, only one thing, Samuel had a cast in one eye. I often longed to know how he would look with two straight eyes, so I had him painted with both eyes alike. Oh, how I have admired that picter. It was the only thing I didn't quite love him for, that squint. Sometimes it were worse nor others, and I know when he was courting me, I used to imagine he had one eye on me and tother on the time-piece, as if he was thinking about going every minute. He's been dead seven year. I wore my bombazine as long as any widow ever does. I mourned him faithful. Folks ought not to gossip if I see fit to choose another." She heaved a sigh and looked coyly at the doctor. "I have saved a good bit of money, and its all in stocks and bonds. This house and the next one is mine, clear from debt. I don't owe anybody. I'm as good a match for a man of my age as you'll find in a long run."

The doctor fidgeted. "Was he listening to a proposal from this old busybody, who was old enough to be his mother, or she ought to be, if she wasn't? Would nothing help him out of this dilemma?" In his uneasiness he had been perilously nearing the edge of the chair, but he was unaware of his peril. He was trying to conjure some excuse for leaving the room without telling a down-right lie. "My dear,"—he was about to add "madam," but his evil star was just then in the ascendant, for, without warning, before he could regain his balance, the treacherous horsehair deposited him at the widow's feet. She did not wait for him to finish his sentence. The sight of him upon his knees before her, where she had so often seen him in her dreams, was too



much, and clasping him around the neck, she held his head tightly against her expansive breast, while she sobbed: "Yes, I know I am your dear. Oh, Arthur! how happy we shall be! I'll turn all the boarders away, and we'll live here all alone, just you and me, ducky."

The doctor struggled to free himself. He felt as if he was slowly suffocating, but she held him fast.

"Oh, how good it seems to again hold a dear head like this," she continued, patting him heavily. The doctor groaned.

"And don't my petsie, wetsie, feel good?" she asked, kissing the bald spot on his head. "Is he sick? Oh, I am such a wonderful nurse. Where is the pain, ducky?"

She let up on her hold of him for a moment, and he partly struggled to his feet, but she caught him again.

"Let me go, woman!" he roared, "you must be mad, stark, staring mad! Marry you? Why, I'd poison you within a week."

"Woman!" she gasped, "oh, that I should live to hear my Arthur call me woman!" She made one grand effort to hold him, but there came a sound like the distant report of a pistol; with a shriek she loosened her arms, and the doctor ignominiously fled. Fled out through the green door, leaving it open behind him; around the porch, into his study, where he bolted and barred the doors and windows. Then he sat down and laughed. Laughed until the tears came at the spectacle he must have presented upon his knees, with the widow hugging him for dear life.

To what good angel he owed his happy release he knew not, but the widow knew only too well. The long suffering stays at last rebelled, and at the most critical moment revenged themselves by bursting.

So ended the widow's courtship. She sat long that night gazing at Samuel's portrait. "To think he should have witnessed my humiliation," she murmured, and then to her excited fancy, one eye began to take on that leer which had been so distasteful to her, and sighing heavily, she arose and turned the picture toward the wall.



## CHAPTER VII.

THE next morning the doctor removed his goods and chattels to "The Five Gables," and took an office on the principal street, getting his meals wherever hunger overtook him. He knew that he was welcome to stay at "The Gables" forever if he liked, but he did not care to. He was conscious of his own strength. He knew that he could live in the same house with Victoria and never tell her of his love, but in some way she might discover it, and then all intercourse, however Platonic, would be at an end between them. She would despise him for a false friend. She could never be made to see his love in the same light with which he received it, so it were best that he should go to "The Gables" as little as possible.

Victoria enjoyed hugely the widow's proposal, and insisted upon his telling it to Andrew. Perhaps it might rouse him from the strange, almost comatose state which had seemed to hold him since he had regained his senses. To lie and dream with his eyes wide open, following Victoria as she moved about the room, was all he had cared to do. He did not often speak, and Victoria grew alarmed at this lethargy, which was so foreign to his nature; so the doctor, one day, at Victoria's bidding, sat down beside the bed and told Andrew of his recent adventure, making it as ridiculous as possible, thereby trying to win from his patient a hearty laugh, but Andrew only smiled dreamily, and watched Victoria as she arranged some flowers in a vase, and placed them near his bedside.

"She is the fairest flower of them all," the doctor heard him murmur. "There is not one to compare with her. No, not one."

The physician saw that Andrew's mind had not been on the story he had just related. In all probability he had not heard a word of it, and the doctor formed a resolution which he immediately put into execution. He asked, abruptly, keeping his eye on the invalid's face:



"Have you thought what the future has in store for you, Andrew?"

The deep-sunken eyes turned inquiringly upon the doctor.

"The future, the future," he repeated, "What have I to do with the future? There is no future for me."

"Then you do not care what becomes of you? You are not desirous of living?"

For the first time Andrew evinced some interest, and there was a flash of the old imperiousness in his manner as he replied: "Who would wish to live if they knew a prison cell stood waiting to receive them? Ask a bird which is suddenly caught and caged after having been free all its life; ask it if it chooses freedom with death as a penalty, or long life behind prison bars, though gilded? It will soon answer by beating its little life out against the cruel wires which cage it."

He stopped and caught his breath with almost a sob. Victoria turned surprised to hear his voice which rang out strong and almost as firm as of old.

"Then you acknowledge your crime, and are willing to suffer the penalty?" asked the doctor bending forward.

Andrew's eyes sought Victoria as if he were seeking strength. "No punishment which man can inflict will exceed that which God has already given. Victoria and the child are lost to me forever, and it is just. My angel who is so pure, so spotless, will return to the man she loves. What matters the tortures inflicted upon this body by a cruel world, I shall not heed them. The heart only can feel, and my heart is gone from me, gone into the keeping of my angel where it will be safe from all sin. Everything she touches becomes pure, you know."

Victoria was weeping. She could not listen unmoved to the words which told of the complete change in this man's nature. He was willing to resign both her and Mary without a struggle, knowing the prior right of the man up stairs. Although he was little better than an imbecile. She knew he loved her still; that their separation would be his death blow; that he could not live without her. She crossed the room rapidly, and knelt beside the bed taking Andrew's wondering face in her hands and kissing it passionately. "I love but



you, my darling. You have sinned against me grievously, but I condone everything, everything, you sinned through love of me. Much can be forgiven you, because you have loved much."

Andrew's face was a study. The glad tidings that at last Victoria loved him with a passion equal to his own came like a shock to him. He was stunned, bewildered, and allowed her to caress him without giving any in return. To him there could come no greater joy than this. She loved him, and her love had withstood the knowledge of his crimes. With a cry he raised his arms and drew her to him as well as his feeble strength would permit. He forgot but that she was in reality his wife, and pressed his lips to hers in a long caress which seemed to draw her very soul from her body.

The doctor softly left the room. Their confidences were not for stranger's ears, and at this moment he felt a stranger. He realized that he had no part or parcel with the two whom he had left. He felt no jealousy toward Andrew because of the love Victoria bore him. Only a sorrow that all this trouble and heartache must come to the woman whom he would have shielded from every care if God had so willed it, and for her sake he would also have shielded Andrew. He saw nothing wrong in this love which each bore the other. For years they had lived in close companionship. The holiest relation had been sanctified by a precious gift from God, little Mary. True the world would not look upon Andrew's faults and crimes through eyes of love. There would be nothing but gravest censure and perhaps a prison cell for him. And what a life for Victoria tenderly reared and nurtured. Her sensitive nature would soon droop and die under the world's cruel darts leveled at her and the child, for what person would believe but that she had been cognizant of the gabled room, and its imbecile occupant all these years? And little Mary, upon whose innocent head must fall her father's sin, and who in time would be the greatest sufferer? Was it necessary to bawl from the housetops that the heir to "The Five Gables still lived, and that a stain rested upon Mary's fair name? No, the doctor thought not. If Roger had even one symptom of returning reason, then it would be a crime to conceal his existence, but he would never recover. The doctor had thoroughly ex-



amined him and found the brain was irreparably injured, probably in the railway accident in which as every one supposed he had lost his life. He might live for years, but his mental condition would remain unchanged. Then why reveal what would affect the lives of so many beings when concealment would harm nobody.

The doctor pondered long over this knotty problem. He went over and over again every little detail bearing upon the matter, and finally concluded to give his advice, if asked, and Victoria should decide as she saw fit.

Meanwhile, the first ecstasy over, Andrew, with his face still pressed against Victoria's, said: "What happiness is mine, dear one! With the sweet knowledge of your love to strengthen me, I can battle with the world. What matters it though every hand be against me, if my Victoria is for me?"

She did not answer him. She was content to lie with her arms about him, her cheek resting upon his. To hear his voice, weak, but, oh, so dear, speaking to her in accents of deepest love, was peace to her tired heart—such peace as she had never known.

Presently he spoke again. "How long have I been ill, Victoria?"

"Do not ask me," she answered. "I have taken no note of the flight of time. To me it has seemed an eternity. I have prayed that you might die, and God, in His great goodness and mercy heeded not my sinful prayer, but stayed His hand, and gave you back to me from the very portals of the grave."

"Why did you pray for my death, Victoria?"

"So that you might be released from all responsibility attending your wrong doing. So that Mary might have been shielded from disgrace. So that I, too, might die with you, for I could not have lived without you. My love for you has grown until it is stronger than Death; stronger than prison bars, even. It shall compass you round and protect you from all danger."

He raised his hand and laid it upon her head caressingly. How her words revealed her innermost soul to him! Once he would have risked his life to hear her utter these sweet words which now she lavished upon him with frank abandonment, and which were characteristic of a true woman's nature, which, when once



she loves, flings prudence to the winds and gives to the object of her adoration the best of her life. So it was with Victoria. Her love had been of slow growth, and, perhaps might never have been revealed to her in its entirety but for the sickness of Andrew. No other thoughts filled her heart but that of sacrificing herself for him and of sparing him every annoyance.

As Andrew caressed her hair, running his fingers through the little curls which clustered about her forehead, she felt a drowsiness steal over her, an exquisite languor which quieted her nerves, and soon threw her into a restful sleep. Andrew watched her with convicting emotions. The knowledge of her love for him had come to him with such suddenness as almost to overwhelm him. He had schooled himself to the belief that Victoria still loved Roger; that she would evince a just hatred for himself when he should have sufficiently recovered, and that a felon's cell awaited him, where he would be shut away forever from the sight of his child. Contrary to his imaginings, she had showered the tenderest caresses upon him, and had told him that she would never leave him, but would follow him to a prison cell if need be. All this was very delightful to Andrew, but, nevertheless, he saw his duty as plainly now as he had seen it at first. Although his body had been weak since his recovery, his brain had been all the more active and God had pointed out his duty in a way he could not fail to see. Restitution, although coming late, must be made to the poor imbecile who had been so greatly wronged. Sweet as he knew Victoria's love promised to be for himself, she must return to Roger though it broke her heart, while he gave himself up to the authorities, to be dealt with as they should determine. The more harsh their treatment, the better it would suit him.

Victoria stirred uneasily, and threw her hand over Andrew so that it rested upon his mouth. He kissed it sorrowfully, reverently, as though in that kiss he was relinquishing his every hope; and as she opened her eyes, he closed his own and feigned sleep. She called his name softly, but he made no motion, and, thinking him asleep, she quietly arose and left the room.



## CHAPTER VIII.

ANDREW improved rapidly. In a few days he was able to sit up and he ate ravenously. The doctor came but seldom now. He had not asked again what hopes Andrew had of the future, but Andrew had not forgotten, and one day when the doctor was about to leave Andrew raised his hand and begged him to stay for a time as he had much to say.

"Through your kindness to me and mine," he said, "you have become one of the family. A trusted friend. As such I wish to confide in you. To make you my confessor as it were. I am strong now, and I feel I ought not to defer this another hour."

"I am at your service," replied the doctor gravely, as he removed his top coat and hat. "Anything which I can do for you will be done cheerfully, and conscientiously."

"I know it," cried Andrew clasping the doctor's hand which was held out to him. "I know it. This household would have been like a rudderless ship without you. I must have an adviser, who shall I turn to but you?"

He held the doctor's hand tightly for a moment, and then dropping it, said: "I will commence my confession dating from the time of Victoria's visit to my mother. I did not love her at first, but soon I began to divine her lovely character; to admire her girlish beauty which at first I could not see. It was not long ere I noticed her dislike for myself. Her evident avoidance of my society. The more she shunned me the fiercer grew my passion, yet in her presence I grew timid, and dared not avow my love. Although I knew I stood not the ghost of a chance of winning her love, I was insanely jealous of anybody or anything for whom she evinced the least show of affection. My brother Roger was away from home all this time, and suddenly there came news of an accident which had befallen him. My mother and myself went to him at once, and as soon as



he was able to travel we brought him home. That night my passion overpowered me, and I followed Victoria as she was leaving the house for a stroll, and frightened her by my vehemence, and she fled from me. Her coldness only fired my ardor, and finding her a good subject for mesmerism, I tried my power upon her, brute that I was, and subjected her to my will. I forced from her the caresses I could not gain any other way. Yes, you may look at me with horror, doctor, but I am telling you the truth. I was a miserable sneaking coward, and I do not wish to spare myself. I will conceal nothing. You know what a handsome fellow Roger was, and what a taking way he had with women? Well, notwithstanding his blindness, Victoria fell in love with him, and he with her. When her mother, Lady Vale, found it out she was furious, and was for packing Victoria off to England without delay. Her opposition only hastened the marriage, for taking my mother who was on their side, they repaired to the judge the very next day and came home man and wife. I had not a suspicion of what had happened until I heard the servants talking it over. I went to my mother and demanded an explanation. What I said I do not recollect, but I know that in my blind unreasoning passion, I said words which killed my mother as surely as though I had pierced her heart with a knife."

The doctor started and looked hard at Andrew. "Then you were the cause of Mrs. Willing's sudden death? I was exceedingly puzzled at the time to determine it."

"Yes," replied Andrew bitterly. "To all my other crimes can be added that of matricide. At the time I did not care if everybody had died excepting Victoria and myself, but in the years which followed I sincerely repented of my brutal anger toward my mother, who, if she loved Roger more than me, loved me far better than I deserved; but, like all murderers, my repentance came too late."

"You do not speak of yourself," interrupted the doctor. "You had no idea of the effect your hasty words would have upon your mother?"

"I certainly did not, but, nevertheless, her death lies on my conscience, and a life-time of repentance cannot wipe out the horror of it from my heart. What next I



have to tell you is terrible. It will show you the blackness of a human heart, the unnatural hatred for a twin brother. I could not bear him to come near me. When I saw him caressing Victoria, I could hardly restrain myself from springing at his throat and choking the life out of him. My brain was busy devising plans whereby I might separate them without committing actual murder. I will not say but what I had murder in my heart, but I had not reached that degree wherein I could muster courage and commit the crime. Nearly a year had elapsed, when one day Victoria saw a notice of a famous oculist who had been performing some remarkable cures on people supposed to be blind. She was all enthusiasm at once. I must take Roger without delay and visit the oculist. She was in too delicate health at the time to think of accompanying us. We started, Roger in a state of excitement and joy at Victoria's last cheering words, that when they next met his eyes would behold her face, and I with black thoughts of evil in my heart toward my brother, for I had resolved that if he regained his eyesight he would not return alive. We traveled by easy coaches until we reached the railroad, and on the third day after leaving home we boarded the train which was to bear us to New York and to the Mecca of Roger's hopes. I was moody and silent; Roger was hopeful and in gay spirits. He built castles of airy structure with lightning rapidity; he lived a score of future blissful years in less than as many hours, while the train sped on and on. I have often wondered since if the devil took an especial interest in that fateful journey. He must have done. As night approached there came signs of a tempest. Dark threatening clouds rolled up from the western horizon, only to meet the same rapidly approaching from the east. Zigzag flashes of lightning, wierd and grandly beautiful, lighted up for a brief moment the high mountain tops above us and the deep gorges far beneath. Our train seemed, when revealed thus, as if hung by a single thread between mountain and rushing torrent. If my mind had not been so occupied with my own develish thoughts, I might have enjoyed the magnificent spectacle, but the deep rolling thunder seemed only a fitting accompaniment to my mood, the one link needed to complete my gloomy chain of thought.



Roger sat quietly in the seat ahead and seemed partly asleep, his head nodding to the motion of the car as it swayed to either side. We were going down a rather steep declivity. I could feel the car tremble like a living creature under the strain bearing upon it. I felt no fear; only an exhilaration born of the impending danger."

"Would we were being borne to perdition," I murmured. The thought was scarcely formed when with a shriek human in its agony, the engine gave a mighty bound, there was a sound as if heaven and earth must have come together, and I knew no more until I awoke to find the sun shining upon a scene of ruin and disaster. Terrible groans mingled with curses and with prayers to God, greeted my ears on every side. My body felt benumbed; paralyzed. I raised my head and saw that my lower limbs were firmly wedged between heavy timbers, while my hands were cut and bleeding. My first thought was of Roger. I called his name. No one answered, although I could hear subdued voices in tones of pity, trying to administer words of comfort to the suffering ones around me. Presently a hooded form bent over me. I raised my eyes.

"'The Virgin Mary be praised,' I heard a voice exclaim. 'This man still lives. Help, good comrades! Leave the dead and come to the assistance of the living.' As in a dream I felt hands working over me, and as the heavy timbers were drawn from my benumbed limbs, and once more the life blood began to flow, the exquisite torture was more than I could endure, and again I fainted."

Andrew stopped while the doctor wiped the moisture from his brow.

"Do not continue," said the doctor kindly. "Defer your tale for a time. You are weary. It is too much for you."

"No, no!" cried Andrew. "Let me unburden my soul. Oh, doctor! if you only knew how I have suffered in my mind. What struggles have been mine, you would pity me, guilty wretch, though I be."

"I know," replied the doctor soothingly. "Nothing but sincerest pity fills my heart for you, Andrew. To err is human. You are but human. At that time you had no strong belief in Christ as a merciful mediator



between spiritual and temporal things. No light had ever been given you."

"Ah, no!" sighed Andrew. "I scoffed at God. The devil only controlled my heart."

"To believe in the power of one, you must acknowledge the supremacy of the other," said the doctor gravely. "To refute God, means renouncing the existence of an evil being. To believe there is a devil, one must also believe there is a God."

"True! true," cried Andrew. "I know it now. Then I did not care to become acquainted with anything divine. My arguments against my Maker were such as an untaught child might have used; senseless and without reason. All things which stood in the path between Victoria and myself must be swept aside, no matter how. She was my religion, my God. To worship before her at her feet; to die there looking up into the sweet, spirituelle face; that alone could bring peace to my soul."

Victoria had come softly into the room without the knowledge of the invalid, and standing out of his sight had heard these last passionate words of a despairing heart. She wept. How gladly would she have taken his head upon her breast, and with sweet, womanly compassion have eased his troubled soul, but he had chosen to confide in some one not so near or so dear. She must be content to watch, and wait and listen, while he told to another the tale of his sin and shame. She watched the doctor, as with all the tenderness of a woman he bent over the invalid, smoothing the hair from his forehead. How thankful to God she ought to feel for this friend raised up so opportunely for them in their distress, yet she was ashamed that a slight feeling of jealousy should mingle with her thankfulness. A jealousy born of the great love which filled her heart, for the man who had so grievously wronged her, yet who had loved her as few women are ever loved. She saw the mighty struggle which was going on within him, photographed upon his face. Great drops of moisture rolled from his brow. His lips trembled with the excess of his emotion. He grasped the doctor's hand and gazed longingly, wistfully at him.

"Doctor will you believe what I am about to tell you? Will you cast all doubt from your mind that perhaps I



am trying to gain sympathy? Will you have faith in the word of a man who has sacrificed honor, truth, everything, to his own guilty desires?"

"I will," replied the doctor gravely.

"I could not gain strength to confess if I saw a shadow of doubt upon your face," continued Andrew. "If Victoria only believes also, I care not for the world's opinion. Why should I? To briefly conclude my confession, I will say that when I again regained consciousness I found my limbs free, and in a few moments with the aid of my hooded Samaritan, I stood upon my feet, and walked. I told him of my brother, and we at once began our search. All rancor had fled from my heart. A fear that I might find him dead drove all other thoughts away. If at that moment I could have died to save my brother's life, I would have done so, for Victoria's sake. Presently we found him lying stiff and silent beside the body of a beautiful young woman. One arm was thrown about her as if for protection. Her head lay upon his breast. A smile, sweet and peaceful curved the corners of his mouth. Her eyes were wide open, and the fearful knowledge of approaching death had frozen in their depths. A jagged hole in each head, at almost the same spot, told the manner of their death. We decided that they were quite dead, and had been for hours. I sorrowed, perhaps not so much for Roger, he was infinitely better off, but for Victoria who just then was totally unfit to bear this extra burden. I told the circumstances to the monk who had assisted me, and we agreed that it was best to despatch two telegrams. The first one should say that Roger had met with a serious accident. After an interval of an hour we would send the next one announcing his death. We carried out that plan, the monk driving to the next town to send the telegrams, while, with the help of others, I carried Roger to the monastery, which was but a short distance away, there to remain until an undertaker should come to prepare the body for a safe removal to our home, for I knew full well Victoria would not consent to a burial so far away. While I was awaiting the arrival of an undertaker, I returned to the dreadful scene, which seemed to hold a fascination for me. The monks were still at work among the dead and



dying. The body of the beautiful unknown lady had been covered by a blanket, awaiting the arrival of friends to identify her. Not far off I discovered a shapeless mass which had once been the form of a man. I stooped over it. Not a feature of the face could be discerned. The trunk had been twisted out of hardly any semblance to a human being, yet the clothing was intact. Only by searching the clothing could this body be identified. I knelt down and felt in the pockets of the coat, not without a sense of horror and repulsion at the eyrie task, but it had to be done. The monks were busy, I must be of all the use I could, recoil as I might. I drew forth a package of papers; one was a marriage certificate dated three days previous. The names were John Joseph Saxon and Julia Almira Brown. In a moment I saw, as in a vision, the beautiful face which now was covered by a coarse blanket, and I remembered where I had seen it before, bright with animation, and the voice full of girlish laughter, as she spoke to her companion, a man rather coarse looking, and several years her senior. I went swiftly back to the silent figure, and, turning away the blanket, took from the hand a new plain gold ring. It was as I had thought. She had been a bride hardly three days, for inscribed within the ring were the initials J. J. S. to J. A. B. To make the identification more sure, a locket hung from her neck by a chain, and inside the locket I found the picture of the man whose face I had connected with hers. Idealized somewhat, as most pictures are, but still I recognized it as belonging to him who had sat beside the beautiful girl, only two seats back of my own. On the other side of the locket the same bright laughing eyes looked out at me, as I remembered them the night before the accident; eyes which had never known sorrow or care, but which now stared up at me with that terrible look of horror frozen in their depths. Yes, these two belonged to each other. It now remained only for me to ascertain where they had come from, and who were their friends, so that they might know of their sad fate. As I again began to search the papers found on the body, I heard a voice at my side say "Are you the chap who brought a man's body to the monastery a little while ago?"

"Yes," I replied. Something in his voice had sent an



icy chill through my veins. "Well, the man's alive, and the fathers sent me to fetch you."

"Alive! I gasped. Roger alive! Man, you know not what you say!"

"'Perhaps I don't,' he answered, with a grin, 'but I guess the fathers do. They ought to know a dead man from a live one, they handle em often enough.'"

"I sat down upon the ground beside the body I had been searching, crushed by the sudden overthrow to all my plans. The first thought was one of gladness that my brother lived, but only for a moment did I rejoice. My good angel had hardly whispered 'I am glad,' ere the devil, with his evil tongue, banished the tender, pleading voice, and the wicked spirit within me which had lain dormant for a time, was aroused to action. I sprang to my feet, and started toward the monastery, leaving the man staring after me open-mouthed. I cannot tell you of the mad thoughts which whirled through my brain as I climbed the steep hill leading to the monastery. I was hardly conscious of them myself. Only one thought was uppermost. Roger must die if he still lived. He should not live to thwart me. I reached the monastery. A monk met me with a cordial smile.

"'Good news, my friend,' he said cheerfully. 'Your brother lives, and there is cause for great hope.'"

"I dared not show my face. I buried it in my hands and whispered a curse. The monk placed his hand upon my bowed head, thinking, no doubt, that I was rejoicing, and breathed a prayer of thankfulness to Him who had seen fit to restore my brother. He led me to an iron cot around which several persons were gathered. 'This is the injured man's brother,' I heard him say, and then as I uncovered my face, a darkness came before my eyes, and I felt myself reeling.

"When I came to myself, nobody was in the little cell but the good father, and a man who proved to be a physician. As I looked enquiringly at him he said: 'You are all right now, my dear sir. The good news of your brother's recovery came too suddenly. You have passed through exciting scenes to-day. No wonder they have affected you.'"

"The form on the cot lay still and without motion. Is that my brother? I asked. 'Yes,' replied the doctor, 'and he will live, but I fear his brain has been injured.



The skull is badly fractured, and I have been obliged to remove a small part of the brain. It may be weeks ere he is rational. He is blind, I see?"

"Yes," I answered mechanically, for I was hardly aware of the meaning of his last question. His words 'He will live'—and—'It may be weeks ere he is rational,' were running through my head and repeating themselves again and again. Oh, to keep the knowledge of his being alive from Victoria until I knew how to act. The telegrams were by this time on the way, if not already received. I must either apprise her immediately of his recovery or keep it forever a secret, allowing her to believe him dead. But—she might insist upon his body being brought home, and in that case everything would be exposed. At that moment a horrible thought flashed upon me. I swear to you, doctor, that it had not occurred to me until then. Do you believe me?"

"I do," solemnly answered the doctor, and the motionless woman sitting within the shadow of the window drapery, bowed her head as if she too had been implored to answer.

"I felt as if some unknown power controlled me," continued Andrew. "I think from that hour I was never again quite myself. Evil whisperings sounded in my ears. My good angel came no more. My conscience slept. I looked at the doctor who was bending over Roger, his kindly face beaming with professional pride at having so skillfully saved a precious life.

"How soon can my brother be removed?" I asked.

"'Not for some time, my dear sir,' he answered. 'Any undue excitement would result in immediate death. Perfect quiet is absolutely necessary. I shall be obliged to banish even you from this room for a few days. I have given him a strong opiate, and I shall keep him under the influence of it for at least a week.' He will receive the best of care? I asked. The doctor bowed his head. 'There are no better nurses in the world than these noble men whom you see about you. They have dedicated their lives to the wants of the needy, the sick and dying. They receive no monetary reward. They are not allowed to. The rich and poor are received on equal terms. A millionaire is treated no better than the strolling beggar. Each is given the best that there is to be had without a



thought from these men of being rewarded on this earth."

"I listened to the doctor's words, meanwhile perfecting the horrible daring plot working actively in my brain. I had a friend aboard the train named John Saxon, I said, resolving at once to plunge into the whirlpool of crime, from which once entered upon there could be no escape. He was a dark-skinned man like myself, about thirty years of age. He was accompanied by his wife to whom he had just been married. In fact, they were on their bridal tour. She was a beautiful woman with laughing blue eyes. I have seen nothing of them. Can it be that perhaps they, too, have met with death?"

"The doctor looked up from Roger's face which he had been studying."

" 'Let us go down to the wreck and try to discover them dead or alive,' he said. 'I will call one of the fathers to watch beside your brother. By the way, I do not know your name. I would like to make a memorandum of this case, and submit it to our medical journal.' "

"Williams," I replied, without a moment's hesitation. "Andrew Williams. My brother's name is Roger."

" 'Thank you, sir,' he said, taking a small book from his pocket and jotting down what I had told him. 'This case will be noted and watched with a great deal of interest. Now come, we will search for your friends. Pray God they may be alive and well.' "



## CHAPTER IX.

"WE descended into the narrow pass where lay in a disordered heap the great engine, its mighty breath stilled forever ; its ponderous wheels bent and twisted as though made of fine wire, while a huge boulder of granite lying across the track, told how the accident had occurred. It had been loosened from its bed far up the mountain side, and the course it had taken could be plainly discerned by the broken trees, and the freshly disturbed earth left in its track.

"A torrent of water swelled by the heavy rains of the night before into an angry turbulent stream, rushed down the mountain and away across the track, as if bent upon an evil mission instigated by some wild spirit of the forest.

"The grandeur of the scene impressed me. For a moment I seemed to realize how small an atom was my human frame compared to all these things made by a wise ruler to complete the universe. With one sweep of His omnipotent hand He could slay the world.

"Then why should I undertake with my baby brain, to perfect a scheme, when by merely laying one finger upon it He could bring ruin and disgrace to me. Only for a moment had I these thoughts, then with an impatient gesture I brushed my forehead as if by so doing I could cast all doubt and fear to the winds, and I said: Why hesitate? I have gone too far now to turn back. It is sink or swim with me. Let fate do its work.

"I had purposely turned in another direction from where I knew lay the body of John Saxon and that of his beautiful bride. In a few moments I heard the doctor's voice calling me. I turned slowly. Even now, that I had determined nothing should stop me from doing my will, the thought of recognizing these people as friends, who were total strangers, and who could not rise to denounce me, made a chilly uncomfortable feeling creep over me. What if they too should come to life like Roger, and then with a nervous laugh at my



idiotic thoughts, I strode toward where the doctor was kneeling, and bent over the figure which he had reverently uncovered. It is she, I said. How beautiful she looks even in death. I unclasped the chain from about her neck and opened the locket. See, I cried, this is John, her husband. He, too, is dead, or else he would have found her ere this. Let us continue our search. With a prayer to the Holy Virgin Mary the doctor covered the sweet face with its staring eyes, and soon he found the shapeless trunk and began searching the pockets. I busied myself over the body of a man some distance away, until I heard an exclamation from the doctor. 'I have found him,' he cried. 'Poor man! Poor girl! It is as you have stated. They were only just married.' He showed the papers. 'What will you do?' he asked. I will take their bodies home, I replied. It is all I can do."

Andrew paused as he saw the look of horror on the doctor's face. "Yes, I know of what you are thinking," he continued. "I separated them. The sweet young wife sleeps under a willow tree, in an old church-yard, many miles from here. Her childhood home. She was an orphan, with no near relatives. No one took the trouble to inquire into the matter. I told the story of the accident to the good people of the village, a little hamlet numbering twenty-five souls, all told. There was a simple burial service, and everybody supposed that husband and wife were buried in one grave, and that one casket contained them both. The body of John Saxon lies here at 'The Gables,' hardly a stone's throw away. His father was a seafaring man, a ne'er-do-well when on shore. His mother had died in the town-house. No danger of *him* ever being inquired for; you see I was careful to get the exact history of these two persons who served my evil purpose so well. Will God forgive me, think you, for separating husbands from wives? First, John Saxon, from his blue-eyed bride; next, Victoria, from my own brother? Oh, God! my sin is grievous."

Andrew covered his face, and sobs, terrible to hear, burst from his lips. The doctor, although loathing this man's sin, could but pity him. His grief was sincere. His repentance genuine.

"There has been no sin so great, but that God, in His



mercy, has forgiven it," he said, stroking the invalid's trembling hands. "He divines the secret workings of your heart. He knows that you are repentant."

"Ah, yes," sighed Andrew. "Repentant when too late. God's patience cannot last forever. There is a limit even to *His* forbearance. Think of the years in which I have gone on sinning, even when my conscience pricked me every moment, and when I knew what the end must be."

"Then you have suffered the throes of remorse?" questioned the doctor.

"Remorse!" echoed the sick man, beating his breast with his clenched hands, "Remorse! Oh, could I describe to you the workings of my brain, the tumults in my heart, which tortured me through the long hours of the night, while those I loved and had sinned for, were sleeping. This last year has been to me hourly a hideous dream, from which I feared to awaken. I knew that my thoughts were driving me mad. I did not care. My only hope was, that if I went mad, I might be removed to where Victoria could not reproach me with her sad face, when she at last should know the truth. Doctor, that woman is Divine. She is not of this earth. I adore her more, if it be possible, than before my sickness, and I curse myself when I think that, upon her dear head must fall all the results of my wrong-doing. The world is harsh. When it knows my story it will not spare her. She and the child will be the greater sufferers. I would willingly be torn limb from limb, I would die a thousand deaths, if it could be the means of sparing them from the jibes and taunts of a cruel, heartless world."

Victoria had listened to Andrew silently but not without emotion. She had followed his every gesture with eyes of love. She heard the confession of his guilt, but her heart did not harden toward him. It only grew more tender. His sin had been great, but now he was repentant. Through his love for her had he sinned. She would show him how much she was now willing to sacrifice for his sake, to shield him from the world. She stepped from the curtain which had concealed her, and rapidly approaching the bedside she threw herself upon her knees, and taking Andrew's hands in her own kissed them passionately.



"The world shall never know your secret, my darling," she cried. "What good can it bring to the poor imbecile up stairs to publish abroad your wrong doing? We only are concerned. Let us live as before, more secluded if you will, only we *must not* be separated. I cannot consent to that. To see you behind prison bars, the subject of ridicule from coarse, low people who could never understand the motive of your crime, would kill me. And Mary, our sweet little blossom, could never recover from the ignominy if the finger of scorn should be pointed at her, and she should be called—a convict's daughter, and—and a—" Victoria hesitated, and then with a low sob hid her face in the bed clothing. She could not pronounce the word which might needlessly wound Andrew, and which so cruelly branded her little innocent child.

Andrew stroked the bowed head slowly, softly, tenderly. He had not known until now the depth and passion of this woman's nature. It was a revelation to him. She was all his own. Though prison bars might separate their bodies no power was strong enough to divide their hearts. He looked at the doctor who was sheepishly wiping his eyes. "The way of the transgressor is hard," he said, still stroking Victoria's head. "My path of duty lies open before me. I must not swerve from it. Victoria, my beloved, I can bear my ignominy now that I have the full assurance of your love. What matters it though prison bars separate us? What care I for the world's derision and contempt, so long as I know that the woman for whom I have sinned loves me, and has freely forgiven me. No sacrifice seems, to great for me to perform, and justice though tardy must be accorded my poor brother. My eyes are open to my sin. I cannot drag you into any further depths of wrong doing. I have worshipped you as an angelic being; I would not now find too much of woman in your nature. To me you must remain as you have always been, pure, and moulded in finer clay than your sister women. Now that you know my crime you must not share it. We could never feel else than degraded though nobody but ourselves be the wiser."

Victoria arose from her knees and kissed Andrew upon his forehead. "As you will," she said, striving for



composure. "Though my heart should break, I will do as you shall direct."

The doctor, who had kept silent, now spoke. His words astonished both Victoria and Andrew.

"In a certain sense Mrs. Willing is right about this matter," he said gravely. "Will you allow me to advise you, Mr. Willing?"

"Most certainly, doctor. Advice from you I should value above all other."

"Then I say, as Mrs. Willing has said; keep this crime a secret."

"What!" cried Andrew, starting from his pillow, "you, too, against me, when I had resolved to ease my conscience, to at last confess my sin to the world? Ah, doctor, I had counted on your strong arm to help me do what is right."

"But you do not grasp my meaning, my dear Andrew. I do not mean to infer you shall not suffer. I will try to explain my meaning by asking you a question. Which had you rather do? Confess your crime to a magistrate, and receive the penalty which would probably be twenty years in prison, with the privilege of seeing Victoria and your child once a month; or would you rather keep your crime a secret, but the penalty shall be a life-long separation from the woman whom you love? You shall never look upon her face again?"

Victoria started and looked almost savagely at the doctor; then turning, she put out her arms toward Andrew. Without a moments hesitation he answered, giving Victoria a loving glance: "I choose the prison cell with all its attendant privations. I cannot lose my angel forever."

With a glad cry Victoria again sunk upon her knees.

"And now you show your selfishness," said the doctor, sternly. "You think justice to your brother demands that you shall make known your crime. I say that it does not. Nothing will be gained by such a confession, but much will be lost. If Roger were in his right mind, I should say, 'Do not hesitate a moment, but give yourself up at once;' but now it matters not to the poor fellow what is done. His clouded brain can never recover.



It is only a question of time with him. On the other hand see what misery and shame will descend upon your child by your confession. She it is who will be obliged to bear the brunt of all your wrong-doing. There is where your selfishness begins. You would hold up your child to the scorn of the world, for the mere pleasure of being able to see the woman you love for a few brief hours every month. You say you have repented, yet your repentance does not reach so far that you can bear an entire separation from the being whom you adore. Your confession will benefit nobody except a parcel of scandal mongers who will only say, 'I told you so. Another rich man gone wrong.' It is as Mrs. Willing says. They would not understand your motive in confessing your crime. What I propose is this. If your repentance is sincere, send Victoria away with her husband, for he has a prior right you must acknowledge. In administering to his comfort she will also learn to control her heart, and God will be with her. There is where *her* duty lies. It seems hard, but nevertheless it is right. And you must stay here alone. Your duties all lie here. Your estates would go to ruin without you. Here is where you are needed. God requires you to confess your sin to Him in all repentance and sincerity, and then to lead a life showing your true repentance. Such a life, I believe, is required of you now. It will be full of self-denial for both of you; of fighting continually with the old Adam within you; but as Mary grows to womanhood, you can have the sweet knowledge of filial love which otherwise, if the truth were known to her, might have been turned to hatred. I do not believe God requires you to make your sin known to the world, and none but a religious crank or fanatic would advise you other than I have done."

The doctor arose and took his hat. "I will leave you to think it over, my dear fellow. Your good sense will tell you to decide as I have advised. Mrs. Willing has already said she will abide by your decision."

He shook the invalid's hand, patted Victoria upon her bowed head as she still knelt beside the bed, and left the room.

No word was spoken between the two who were so near together, yet who felt themselves being separated



by a hand powerful, but tempered with a divine love and compassion most soothing to their bleeding hearts.

At last Andrew raised Victoria's head and looked into the sad depths of her tearful eyes. Then gathering her to his breast with all his feeble strength, he placed his lips to her's in a long caress which she felt to be one of renunciation for all time.



## BOOK THE THIRD.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### FIVE YEARS AFTER.

AT THE most northern apex of Great Britain there is a quaint village called Duncansby Head. The turbulent waters of Pentland Firth wash the beach, along which are scattered a few simple huts inhabited principally by fishermen's families. No more wild or lonely spot could well be imagined. It seems almost shut off from the entire world, and a place which none but those who wished to escape from all society would have chosen. One would be as completely hidden as though buried forever, and here Victoria had brought Roger accompanied by Adam, and a stout Scotch woman whom she had picked up as she passed through Scotland.

Why Victoria had chosen this particular spot she could not have explained if she had been questioned. When it had been decided that she should take Roger away—that she must separate from Andrew perhaps for all time—she had a desire to seek some place far removed from her home—and those who were so dear to her—a place where she might live unknown, and where nobody knew her. The doctor had said that a sea-voyage might be beneficial to Roger. Victoria grasped at the suggestion with eagerness. With the ocean between her and her love, she might find peace, so hurriedly gathering a few necessary articles together, she set out for New York, bound upon a journey to where she knew not. The doctor accompanied her at Andrew's urgent request. The idea of the tenderly-nurtured woman—whose every wish had been gratified almost before it was spoken—going out into the world with an imbecile, and a tongueless servant as her only companions, was gall and wormwood to the man who knew



that his sin was the cause of her banishment. As his bodily health improved his mind became stronger and more active, and he would sit by the window looking out over his fair lands—fair no longer to him because the one who had made them enjoyable was about to leave them, and perhaps forever. If Victoria entered the room his eyes followed her about hungrily. Often when she passed near him he would secretly catch her gown and press it to his lips. If she turned suddenly toward him as if about to speak, she only saw him stolidly gazing out the window, seemingly unconscious of her presence.

This, too, was a bitter, trying time for her. Another burden had been laid upon her already overtaxed shoulders. The doctor objected to little Mary accompanying her. Much as she rebelled at the thought of parting with her child, she acknowledged the doctor's superior wisdom in ordering Mary's detention. The child was old beyond her years, her memory was wonderfully retentive. If Victoria persisted in taking her she must expect to be asked very embarrassing questions as the child grew. Now, if left behind, and the subject never referred to, the old man she had seen in the gabled room would soon fade from her memory. Not so if she was brought into daily contact with him as she must necessarily be if she accompanied Victoria.

Another thing the doctor argued—and here he showed fine diplomacy—was Andrew's loneliness if bereft of all his loved ones. The doctor pictured the long winter days when Andrew would see no cheering faces. The still longer nights when his chamber would be empty, and no restless little figure tumbling in its crib, or a sweet, shrill voice shouting for a drink of water. Victoria could not withstand this last plea. The thought of brightening Andrew's loneliness by sacrificing her own pleasure tempered her keen anguish at leaving this dear bone of her bone, and flesh of her flesh, and so one day when Andrew had come in from his first short walk, she said with a smile in which there was no shadow of the fierce pain at her heart: "I am going to leave our sunbeam with you, Andrew. She is such a chatterbox, and will enliven the long winter days, and the little crib beside your bed will not be empty when you waken in the night."



Andrew stretched out his hands and drew Victoria to him. "God bless you," he said reverently. "God watch over and protect you, but He will. You are of His chosen ones. No harm can ever come to such as you. I have longed to keep Mary, but I would not broach the subject and ask this sacrifice of you. It would have been too presuming on my part, but now, now that you have offered how gladly do I accept. The touch of her baby fingers will keep me from all sin. The sound of her sweet voice will heal the canker which seems eating into my heart. Again I say God bless you Victoria."

He had put her from him without a caress. She had been sacred to him from the day when against his will he had chosen liberty without her, to prison bars with the occasional light of her face to cheer him; and then he slowly ascended the stairs to the gabled room where Roger sat laughing at the queer antics of Adam, who was creeping about the room on all fours, making noises in imitation of a dog, cat, sheep, cow, or anything he happened to think of.

"Good, Adam," cried the imbecile clapping his hands, "nice Adam, do it again, my Adam." He turned when he heard Andrew's footsteps, and a troubled look came over his face. "Go away," he whined. "You will make Adam stop. Go away, I tell you, you ain't wanted here."

Andrew stood sadly gazing at the mental wreck before him. How gladly now would he welcome the light of returning reason in that face which he had so hated. With what joy would he bring light to those darkened eyes if he only had the power.

Roger was beating the air with his hands. His hearing was most acute, and he knew that Andrew still lingered. "Adam," he called, "put that thing out. I can hear it breathe; it annoys me."

Andrew put out his hand and touched his brother. "My poor Roger," he said. "Don't you know my voice? cannot you remember brother Andrew?"

Again the troubled expression crossed the imbecile's face, but only for a moment; then he raised his hand as if to strike at something. "Go away," he cried. "Adam won't be a cat so long as you stay. Cry like a cat, again, Adam," and as Adam set up a series of meows



which made Roger shout with glee, Andrew turned sadly and left the room. As he entered his study he saw his chair in its accustomed place before the writing-desk. He threw himself into it and bowing his head upon the desk he wept long and sorrowfully. No need for this man to go before a jury to receive sentence. Every hour his punishment hung heavier upon him; every moment his conscience lashed him with greater fury, until, as now, he was prone to cry: "Enough, my God! enough!"

As the time came for Victoria's departure he tried to cast aside the gloom which depressed him, and appear cheerful so as not to add one straw to the brave woman's burden. He assisted the doctor to remove Roger from the house at night when all was quiet. The doctor had given his patient a strong opiate, so that he would not attract notice by crying out, and himself acting as driver, with Andrew and Adam caring for Roger, he drove twenty miles to an out of the way station, there to await the coming of Victoria.

The next night Andrew drove home alone, and when Victoria bade him good-bye at the station the following day, the lookers on had not a suspicion of the tragedy overshadowing the fair, self-possessed woman, who shook her husband's hand so calmly, and who pressed only one kiss on the soft cheek of her baby girl with an almost indifferent air. Nor had these same people any thought save that of envy, for the sad-eyed, stern-faced man, who stood watching the train bearing out of his sight perhaps forever, the being who had been all the world to him for so many years. To those about him he was the richest man for miles around; he had just recovered from an illness which would have killed any ordinary man, and therefore, as one person said—looking after Andrew as he strode from the station with Mary perched upon his shoulder: "That's the luckiest man in Virginia. Everything he touches turns to gold. He has had more positions of trust offered him than any other man in the country. A word from him carries more weight than as if the Governor had spoken. Everybody envies him." But if that man could have seen the object of his envy a few moments later, when, after escaping from the prying eyes of people, he was slowly driving homeward, there would have been nothing but pity in his heart for



the wretched man. He had taken Mary upon his knee, and had buried his face in her sunny curls. For a few moments he said nothing; his grief was too deep for words; while Mary, with a grave air far beyond her years, patted his head with her soft hand. She had not shed a tear at parting with her mother. Victoria had had a long talk with her the night before, and Mary felt the importance of her charge. Mamma had told her she must not cry because if she did papa would get sick again. That everything funny she saw during the day she must tell papa at night so as to cheer him. That she must never do anything to annoy him. That she must try to be his little comfort until mamma returned, which Mary reasoned would be to-morrow. She stroked the hair back from her father's hot throbbing temple, and her touch soothed him. He hugged her closer, and thought how wise Victoria had been to leave him this jewel; this priceless pearl.

"Love me hard, little one," he said, trying to master his emotion. "Papa has need of all your love. He is sick unto death."

"But you won't get any sicker if I don't cry, will you?" queried Mary, peering anxiously in her father's face. I did want to cry awful bad when mamma kissed me, and a heap of gullops came up in my throat, and I thought I'd never get 'em all down again. What makes gullops come up in my throat, papa? Do you have them?"

"Sometimes, dear child," replied Andrew, smiling at Mary's quaint question. "Where did you hear that expression?"

"Oh, from old Chloe, papa. Whenever any of the pickinins gets choked or anything, she always goes for them with her shoes, and cracks them on the back, and says: 'Dere's dat chile gullop in' again. Some day he'll snuffocate, suah.'"

Andrew laughed and kissed the bright winsome face of his child, while again he thought of Victoria's wisdom in leaving to him her treasure. Ah, what watchful care would he take of her, so that when the right time should come, he might place her in Victoria's arms and say: "This link, which has bound us, has not been broken, only unclasped. Take it, that once more may we be united."



Meanwhile Victoria sat like a statue, her dry eyes looking out upon the bleak hills, and gray overcast sky, as the train sped swiftly on. To her excited fancy all nature mourned at her departure, and somehow the thought comforted her. If the sun had smiled, and the birds had sung, she could not have borne it. She had drained her cup of sorrow to the last dregs. One more drop, and she would have succumbed. She had a wild longing at the last moment to throw her arms around Andrew's neck before all the crowd, and beg him to confess right there and then, so that she might not leave him, but stay and defy the world for his sake. Anything, however dreadful, was better than this separation, which seemed to be tearing her heart from her body; but she looked at Mary and forbore. "For her dear name," she whispered, and then her face, wearing a smile, her heart burning like a volcano, she stepped aboard the car, and was borne away from those she loved so passionately to where stern duty awaited her.

Upon meeting the doctor and his companions she was the same self-possessed woman who had parted from Andrew. No tears, no mention of regrets. She fixed the pillows for Roger with a deft hand which did not shake or tremble. The doctor marveled as he watched her. "Made to endure," he murmured, "made to endure."

The party traveled leisurely until they reached New York, and after the doctor had placed them upon the best packet-ship bound for England, he turned his face toward home.

"Be good to my loved ones," were Victoria's parting words. "Make your home with Andrew. It will cheer him."

"I will," replied the doctor. "Keep a brave heart, Mrs. Willing. Remember the same God watches over us all."

Upon reaching England Victoria sought a quiet villa in the suburbs of London, where she hoped to be free from prying eyes. She engaged two maid servants, who seemed to be quite steady, and not inclined to gossip; and a man of all work, deaf apparently to anything going on around him, but alert to every order given him by his mistress. A model English servant. Here Victoria lived in absolute retirement for nearly a year.



She was not unhappy. The consciousness of having done her duty toward the poor imbecile—who now clung to her more tenaciously than he had ever done to Adam—served to sweeten her life. Then she did not forget the poor and unhappy beings who were all about her. Her health demanded exercise, and every day, rain or shine, she drove about the city. Usually she took Roger with her, for although he could not see, he delighted in the rapid motion of the carriage, and was never so quiet or tractable as when riding with his hand clasping Victoria's.

In her drives Victoria saw much of the squalid misery existing among the poor of London. Her heart often bled as she looked upon these scenes, and she resolved that in some way she must contribute her share toward helping her lowly, unfortunate sisters. Especially was she interested in the little children, whose wan poverty-lined faces, made prematurely old looking by hunger, appealed to her heart, and carried her memory back to old Virginia, and a sweet, happy face which had never known hunger or care. To think with Victoria was to act. When her plans became settled in her mind she went to her bankers, and told them that she wished to draw on Mr. Andrew Willing for ten thousand pounds. It was a large amount, and naturally they refused to accommodate her until they had first heard from Mr. Willing. "Communicate with him at once," she said, with a smile. "I will call for the answer in a month." She had no fears as to what the answer would be. She knew well that Andrew would send her the last penny of his fortune, and never ask what disposal she meant to make of it; so at the expiration of a month she walked into the bank with a confident air, and smiled as the banker deferentially handed her a letter which read: "Honor a draft for any sum of money Mrs. Willing chooses to ask for."

A week from that time a site had been chosen, and ground broken for destitute, crippled and orphaned children.

It had been agreed between Andrew and herself that they would not correspond. Both felt that such a barrier was needed. So much might be said on paper; but every day Victoria wrote a few words to Mary, sometimes enclosing a line to the doctor; and the foreign



mail which left England twice a month, never failed to have among its letters a bulky package addressed to Andrew Willing. Victoria thought best to address all letters in Andrew's name, so as to allay all suspicion which might arise in the mind of the village postmaster.

Of course, every gossip in the town had his or her opinion as to the queer doings at the Five Gables. Some of the more fertile minded averred that Andrew's illness had made him mildly insane, except at times, when he would become furious, and in one of these spells he had tried to kill his wife, therefore fearing for her life she had fled to England where she was living in close retirement with her mother. What more natural, but why had she left her child behind to be perhaps killed by the maniac in one of his spells? This question was a puzzler to the good people, who felt as if some secret was being withheld from them which if told would make a dainty morsel to chew upon and roll about on their tongues until thoroughly masticated; and naturally Andrew's neighbors—if they could be called such, the nearest house being a full half-mile away—agreed that they were shamefully imposed upon. The fact of the doctor having taken up his residence at "The Five Gables," lent still further credence to the story of Andrew's insanity, and he was looked upon as a dangerous man.

The doctor was obliged to parry many skillfully worded questions from his patients, who suddenly evinced a warm interest in his well being, asking him "if he were not afraid to live in the same house with Mr. Willing, whom rumor said was becoming more dangerous every day, and who had actually thrown a plate at Pete's head just because the soup was not hot enough."

The doctor felt a keen pleasure in mystifying his questioners, who concluded after a time that they had made no headway in solving the secret; so like all other mysteries this too sank into the background, and gave place to the latest scandal, until one day it was suddenly revived by a person whose veracity had never been questioned, and who swore that having occasion to pass "The Five Gables" at the solemn midnight hour, he had been astonished, almost paralyzed, when he saw the western gable brilliantly lighted up and forms pass



ing to and fro, while the weird sound of a violin—"played by no human hand he could swear"—floated out to his ears on the still evening air.

This story caused the wildest excitement among the villagers, who gathered in little knots at the street corners, or sat around on sugar barrels in the principal grocery, discussing this new feature which was the most startling of anything so far connected with the mystery of "The House of Five Gables." Night was welcomed eagerly, and for hours after darkness fell, the eyes of the whole population were turned toward the house way up on the high cliff. Even the huge comet which was then visible, and which was an object of fear and terror to most of the villagers, sank into insignificance beside this ghostly inhabitant of the western gable, in the house where so many mysteries were being concealed.

The story of the beautiful slave girl who had held court in that same gable more than fifty years ago, was again revived by old residents, who shook their gray heads and wagged their toothless jaws, while they predicted that some dreadful evil was about to befall the present owner, when ghosts which had lain quiet for half a century came back to revel in the haunts they had once inhabited. Several lights could be seen in the lower part of the house, but the western gable was still shrouded in darkness. As the night wore on the lights gradually disappeared, usually heralded by some urchin more vigilant than the rest, who would shout: "There goes one. Only three more now to be put out," and finally as the last one disappeared, everybody watched with bated breath, as they waited to see what would happen next. At last a brilliant light shown out like a meteor from the western gable. A sigh went up from the watching people, interrupted for one brief moment by a diminutive urchin of an enquiring turn of mind, who had climbed a tall post to be nearer the exciting spectacle, and who, as the bright light shot out—his footing being insecure—fell with a howl upon the heads of those beneath him, where he was caught by his enraged father, and after a spanking—administered heartily and accompanied by the satisfied grunts of those most interested—was thrust out of sight behind his mother's skirts, where smothered sobs and surrepti-



tious kicks, told of the spirit not having been entirely quelled, while between sobs could be heard a small voice crying piteously "to be let to see the ghost."

Superstition had thoroughly taken hold of every one present, and the women would clutch each other by the arm as a form passed between the window and the light, while they whispered: "There she is now! Can't you see her long black hair?"

As they were standing fully fifty rods from the house, the question would seem rather superfluous unless one was gifted with eyesight of telescopic power, but to their excited fancy the form of Bella, as they had heard of her, was now reproduced by this specter, and one person described her as being dressed in white loose garments, waving her arms wildly as she passed back and forth; while another solemnly averred that the ghost had simply a blanket wound around her in Indian fashion, and wore feathers in her hair.

At last a man stepped out from the excited mass, and boldly declared, "Ghost, or no ghost," he would volunteer to go up to "The Gables," and arouse its inmates and offer his services to allay the specter. A low rumble of approval greeted this brave declaration, but suddenly a woman darted from the crowd and threw herself upon him. "Thou art daft, mon," she cried. "Wou'dst thee leave the childer wi'out a faäther, and me a widdy? Let Maister Wiilin' tak' care o' his spooks, hissen, and thee abide here wi' we uns. If thou goo'st I'll never see thee mo'ore."

"Shut up thine idle croakin', woman," rejoined the man, angrily unclasping her clinging arms. "I war a fighter i' Lancashire, afraid o' nothin', an' wi' anither gude mon to help, I'll doon tha spook."

"I'm with you," spoke a voice, and a brawny fellow with muscles like iron, and sledge-hammer fists, joined the bragging Englishman.

The crowd watched these two as they slowly climbed the cliff, until the darkness hid their forms, and then in groups of three or four they discussed the probability of their companions' safe return; while the wife of the Englishman was sobbing bitterly a little way apart, and was looked upon as already a widow, and the two mites clinging to her skirts as orphans.

"I mind Tom Butts, who chased a wild cat into the



mountains," said a woman in a sepulchral whisper, which was plainly heard by "the widow." "It led him on and on, till finally it turned into a giant man, over seven feet tall, and Tom never come back."

A prolonged wail from the weeping "widow" stopped further reminiscences, and the woman failed to enlighten her hearers, how it became known if Tom had not returned, that the wild cat had turned into a giant man.



## CHAPTER II.

THE light still continued to shine from the gabled window. The ghost had not been exorcised as yet, for still the form flitted to and fro, and one man casually remarked "that as ghosts knew everything, it had no doubt been warned of the hostile approach of the Englishman and the brawny blacksmith, and had sent out an evil power to slay them," and then he facetiously added, "that he wished he had taken his horses to be shod, as he minded to that day. Now the nearest smithy was ten good miles away. Jack would never show up to shoe any more horses."

Another ear-splitting wail from a gray-haired woman, presumably Jack's mother, and a chorus of voices crying, "for shame, Joe Bull, to joke over the poor lad. Go away wi' you for an evil sperrit yoursen'," caused the would-be joker to slink into the background covered with ignominy.

At last a sound as of returning footsteps down the steep cliff was heard, and a subdued murmur like the hum of bees began to drift through the crowd. Was it Jack and his companion returning? or could it be the evil spirits, who, having destroyed those two brave men, were now bent on wiping out from the land all those who had lent a helping hand toward exposing the ghost of "The Five Gables."

"Let's be movin'," said one woman gathering up her brood in the ample folds of her gown, much as if they had been fagots of wood. "I never war for disturbin' the poor spooks. Let em trouble them as has a evil conscience. Poor folks like we uns has no use for ghosts." Her words electrified her hearers, and with one accord they turned to depart. Some with dignity as if the sound of ghosts' footsteps were an every day occurrence with them; others looking back over their shoulders fearfully trying to penetrate the darkness, and the mystery of those fast advancing footsteps.



"Hoo, hoo," sounded a voice which seemed to come from the earth underneath their very feet. "Hoo, hoo."

A nervous negro woman with a cry of "Dey is arter we uns suah. I took dat par o' stocks' jes fer fun, good ghos', I'll gub em back to missy to-morrow, suah,"—was the cause of a general stampede, and men, women and children, made wild with fear by the woman's loud yells, stumbled over each other in their frantic efforts to get to a place of safety, but the hurrying feet behind them were coming, were gaining on them, and some of the weaker ones realizing their inability to escape, sank upon their knees and gave themselves up to their dreadful fate with a wail of despair.

"What's all this bloomin' row about?" exclaimed a familiar voice much blown from hard running. "Any body'd think the very de'il himsel' war after thee, folks."

"Oh! is it thee, my gud mon?" cried the Englishman's wife with a scream of joy. We were daft wi' fear. We thoc'ht the ghosts had swallied thee, an' war coomin' down tha brue for tha rest o' we uns."

A hearty laugh from the two "brave men" did much toward restoring the courage of the fleeing people, who now turned and crowded around the heroes, eager to hear of their adventures. Many men solemnly shook them by the hand, saying "glad to see thee back again," as if they had just returned from a long and perilous journey, while the women more curious asked in awe-struck voices: "Wha' did thee see, Jack? War it really the ghost o' that yaller gal, Bill?"

"Naw," sneered the Englishman with a wave of his hand. "We war weel laughed at for meddlin' wi' what war none o' our business. Maister Willin hissen' ha' opened thot windie for ti' luke at t' comet i' tha' sky. He ha' a telescope brocht fra foreign parts an' it be woonderfu'. He let us luke at uns, ha Jock?"

"Yes," said Jack, who seemed quite crestfallen and inclined to hide his head. "Yes, but I had rather found the ghost."

"Tell us what you seen, Bill?" cried his hearers eagerly.



"Oh, it war' woonderfu', I tell thee, woonderfu'. Thee joost luke through a round hole made o' glass, and thee seeist this thin' awa' oop i' tha sky, like a fiery furnace. Beats thy forge all to nothin', hey Jock?"

Jack made no answer. He was plainly disgusted with himself for having been made a fool of. The Englishman continued: "An' wha' do'est thee think, gude people. Maister Willin' say'es as how that thin' has a tail one hundred an' feefty thousand miles long."

Several laughed as Bill delivered this speech, and one man said: "I knowed Andrew Willing were daft. Only a man all wrong in the upper story would be sayin' an' doin' such crazy things. The next thing you'll be tellin' us Bill, is that the doctor has gone mad, too."

"It war he as ope'd the dure fer me an' Jock," replied Bill, "an' he near cracked 'is 'ead i' two joost laughin' at hour fuleishness. 'Jock,' 'e said, 'I thought you 'ad more brains nor this. I woonder h'at you. Coom h'up steers, Maister Willin' don't make no secret o' that gabled room. It are open ti respectation', or somethin' like that 'e said, so we went h'in kind o' fearfu' like."

"I was'ent fearful," spoke up Jack quickly. "Speak for yourself, Bill."

"Thee got as white h'as a sheet, mon," returned Bill excitedly. "Thee was't afeer'd ti luke aside. Thee nee'r expected ti come out'en theer alive, an' wi' a whole skin."

"Go way with you for a bloody liar," retorted Jack hotly. "I never was afraid of anything yet."

"Haa liar his it!" cried Bill, squaring off. "Ca' me haa liar, do'est thee? Hi'll teach thee to hinsult thy betters."

"Come, come; stop your quarreling," said a man stepping between them. "Don't you know that Jack could wipe up the earth with you, Bill, if he just wanted to? Why you would be a dead man in two seconds. See, daylight is breaking, and the most of us are chilled through. We'll have snow before many hours. Let us all go to our homes, and to-night we will meet at the post office, and you can finish your tale."



Jack had turned away in disdain as Bill squared at him. "Fight that thing," he muttered, "well I reckon as how I want a man to stand up against, not a puppy," and looking defiantly at the crowd he walked toward his forge, while the others slowly dispersed to their separate homes.



## CHAPTER III.

THE doctor and Andrew had many a quiet laugh over the ghost of the western gable, and the light still continued to shine as formerly, but nobody disturbed their midnight star-gazing after that; although not a few among the more superstitious inhabitants still looked askance at Andrew whenever he appeared in the village, and some even whispered that he was in league with the evil spirits, and had compelled the doctor to join hands with him, and that the devil himself had been seen walking arm in arm with Andrew on the little balcony under the gabled window, many and many a wild stormy night when neither man or beast hardly dare venture out. Of course, such absurd stories never found their way to either Andrew's or the doctor's ears, but Andrew had not failed to observe a change in the general bearing of those whom he chanced to meet, a furtive glance of the eye perhaps, or a sudden crossing to the other side of the street to avoid meeting him face to face; but he was too much engrossed in his own affairs to allow such petty trifles to worry him. He did not wish for any man's society. The doctor and he lived very comfortably together. The men whom he met in a business way could not complain of any inability on his part in a business transaction. His brain was all right there whatever it might be on other things. His silent, rather morose countenance, was uninviting to would be questioners, and not one among his acquaintances had dared to ask him why Victoria had gone abroad, or why she remained away so long; and he who never bothered over his neighbor's affairs did not dream of enlightening anybody by volunteering information on a subject in which only himself and Mary were interested. He had no idea of the frequent tea gatherings, where sometimes he and his were the sole topics of conversation. It would hardly have troubled him if he had known, so many weightier subjects filled his mind.

To him the days which brought the foreign mails



were the only ones of all the month worth living for. He always went for the precious freight himself, taking Mary with him. The child had come to know those big envelopes with the funny seals on them, as coming from mamma, and he always allowed her to break the seal, and then as eagerly as the child listened, just so eagerly would he read the dear words, penned by loving fingers which he knew longed to clasp his own. Although addressed to the child, Andrew knew that every word was written for himself, and the endearing expressions were kissed and kissed again, until the paper seemed to him to almost take on life under his caresses. He would be more cheerful for a time after one of these missives came to cheer him, and the doctor hailed the foreign mail as eagerly as either Mary or her father, for it meant a brighter household for a few days at least, and too, the cheering news of Victoria's good health and evident contentment made glad the doctor's heart.

It was he who suggested teaching Mary how to print, so that Victoria's life might be brightened by a letter from her baby-girl, written all by herself, with no suggestions or corrections from either him or her father. Mary set about her task willingly, and was indefatigable in her efforts at learning how to spell and print; and it was a wonderful production which one day nearly a year after Victoria's exile, was given by Mary herself with many charges to the village postmaster, that he put that letter sure in the foreign post-bag, for it was going to her dear mamma who was very lonely way off across the big water.

Victoria, although not unhappy, had many days of longing to hold Mary in her arms. Sometimes she would awaken in the silent night, and put out her hands expecting to clasp the beloved child to her breast, so vivid had been her dreams, but alas, when aroused to full consciousness, when she realized how far away from her was the darling of her heart, then at such times did she rebel, and when morning came the evil spirit within her could only be exorcised by her going to the children's home, and herself superintending some part being built for Mary's sake. She always felt better after one of these visits, and every day she wrote accounts of the progression of her work to the little daughter far away,



and told her of the little sick and crippled children who were anxiously waiting for the completion of their home, which had been named "The Mary Willing Home for Destitute Orphaned and Crippled Children."

Victoria's mail was received through her bankers, and the days on which she might expect letters were always anxious ones to her. The doctor never failed to write a few lines, telling her that all was well with those she loved, and on this particular day she left "The Home" much earlier than usual, and drove around to her bankers, for having read of the arrival of a mail-ship, she was sure there must be mail for her. There was, and a smile of gladness lit up her usually sad face as the old clerk handed her a large bundle of papers, and three bulky letters. "I am especially favored this time," she said, electrifying the man with that unusual smile. "You do not know, perhaps, what it is to feel that a cruel treacherous ocean separates you from those whom you love."

Tears stood in the old man's eyes. The sweet glad smile had awakened sad memories. "But you hope to meet your loved ones alive and well some time, dear lady," he said so sorrowfully that Victoria looked at him interested. "They have not crossed that boundless ocean, which never brings the loved ones back when once they are upon its waters."

"Ah, no," replied Victoria, "I have been spared that, thank God! But you speak as one who has sorrowed. Have you lost many dear ones?"

"All, all! my lady. Five lovely children taken in their innocence before they had known evil. The sixth was spared to me until she grew to womanhood. Last year she too sickened and died, leaving a little flower in her stead, a frail little blossom. Last week my good wife was taken from me; now only the child and I are left."

Such hopeless resignation was shown in those words, that Victoria felt her eyes moisten. She noticed the threadbare clothes, the worn black tie, the frayed edges to the spotless cuffs. His entire outfit if sold, would not have brought a pound; but the marks of a gentleman were patent in the spotless linen, the well kept nails, the general appearance of the whole man. Victoria had heard of the meager salaries which most bank



clerks in England received. Hardly enough to keep body and soul together, and she wondered how she could assist this man without offending his pride. She thought of the little granddaughter. Oh yes, here was a way surely.

"I have a little daughter in America," she said, "I have not seen her in nearly a year. I love all children for her dear sake. I would like to know your grandchild, perhaps she would cheer and comfort me. Let me have your address. I will call with your permission and take her driving. How old is she?"

"Four years, my lady," replied the old man, "but she is a frail little thing. I thank you for your kindness. A drive once in a while might do her world's of good. I don't have much money to spend on extras like that." He glanced at his clothing, and Victoria thought she saw a shade of bitterness cross his face.

"I will call at your house after the bank closes this afternoon," she said, "and take both you and the child for a long drive. What is your address, please?"

"No. 20 Deptford road," he replied, his eyes glistening with pleasure. "I lodge with a widow named Mrs. Ball. My name is James Catherwood Vale; my little granddaughter's name is Dora."

Victoria nearly dropped the pencil and paper from her hand, while she stared at the unconscious face before her. James Catherwood Vale! the name of her own father's brother who had been disinherited because he had married a governess. Could this be he? Catherwood had been the maiden name of her paternal grandmother, Dora Catherwood. Dora Vale, her cousin, was the one who should inherit her own little fortune which she had forfeited by marrying Roger. Now, this man, James Catherwood Vale, had a granddaughter named Dora. How strangely like a fairy tale if this should indeed prove her uncle.

These thoughts flashed through her mind with lightening rapidity, while she regained her composure, and jotted down the address he had given her.

"I will surely call for you," she said, holding out her hand cordially; and as James Vale clasped it in his, he wondered why this strange lady should take this sudden interest in him and his.

He had seen her come in and go out of the bank



many times within the past year. He had even handed her the mail more times than one, and he had also wondered what great sorrow could have befallen her, for never until to-day, had he seen a smile upon the sad face. A smile which transformed it into almost angelic beauty.

As Victoria entered her carriage she told the driver to take Oxford street, and drive to Hyde Park. She did not wish to go home for a while where Roger was waiting, with an avalanche of questions the moment she came in, and who would have to be amused for hours perhaps, so that she might not have a moment for quiet thought. She also wanted to read her letters, and as she settled herself among the cushions of her carriage, she thought: "I hope this man may prove to be my uncle, and the little one my cousin. I shall not feel quite so isolated."

For the first time since receiving her mail she glanced at the different handwritings. "Two from the doctor," she said, "and, what is this? Oh, I believe the dear child has written to me all by herself. None but a child directed this envelope." With eager fingers she tore the envelope apart, and after glancing at the heading of the letter pressed it to her lips, and kissed the queer, illformed letters again and again. "Ah, how precious," she murmured, "my baby's fingers have become tired and weary over this task, but for mamma's sake they have kept on." She held the paper from her and gazed at it with a world of love in her eyes. "There is not money enough in all England to buy this little scrap of paper," she cried, "no, nor in the world."

When she became calmer she began to read the letter aloud. She loved to hear her voice pronounce the misspelled words, printed by loving fingers, and which came as messengers of peace to the tired starved heart, which had longed, oh so many times, to feel the touch of those baby hands. The letter was characteristic of the child, and Victoria laughed and cried by turns as she read: "My deer'est and truly butyful'est Mamma Wont you be s'prised when you get this well I reken you wil' papa and uncel doctor has teeched me to print and spel' but I can print better than I can spel' papa sey I must rite this al' bi miself for you wil' think mor' of it if he dont



cor'ect it wil' you you must rite in your next and let me no uncel docter sey I'l do beter next tim' but I like it O mamma before I forget to tel' you I must tel' you Jenny my pretty pony has a little baby the swe'test thing you ever saw with long leggs as long as Jennys Jenny keeps liking it al' the tim' al' over with her tong I'm not sure tung is spel' rite but I mus' not ask papa for he wil' not help me if I do for he sed he wood not and he alwa's dus as he sey O mamma pete has mar'id the gurl who puts on my sho's and stokings They went off one da' and when they com' ba'k petes mama gave him such a beeting that Rosa went criing to papa and sed they got marid so they did and papa laffed and gave them five dollars apace and Rosa sey she'd get marid ev'ry day for five dol'ars and pete sey he get drub'ed every day to for five dol'ars so I spose they ar' hapy O mamma aint tomoro' a long ways off I thou't you wood be home by tomoro' but it seems as if ther' had bin a good many tomorows sinc' you went away' Flora my dol' has met with a axident and uncel docter has had to ampertate her rite leg and tak' out her rite ey' wich becom' brok' nobodi no's how I never did care mutch for Flora so I did not even shed a tear al' the rest of my children ar'e doing well thank you except jonny jump up who has the meesels and Tina' who has slow consumson wich uncel docter sey will be her deth som' day' O mamma papa do'se not cri so mutch as he did w'en you first went awa he used to hug me so tite he hurt me and then he wood cri and make me feal bad to but I did not cri for you told me I mus' not I have been reel good wen nite comes and I go to bed papa alwa's tel's Rosa he wil' undres' me and then we have such fun papa and me and then he razes the blind w'en he le'ves me so I can look at the stars in the sky for he sey the same stars ar' shining upon my mamma way off over the water and then I go to sleep W'en ar' you coming home mamma I want to see you and so doos papa for I asked him one da' and he sed he wood lose ha'f of his life to take your dear hands in his I lov' papa derely and I lov' you and then I lov' uncel docter who likes to have me cal' him uncel for he has not got any litle gurl but me my hare is down to my waste in long curls and Rosa scolds caus' she has to curl it every morning but papa makes her come home soon deerest



and most lovely mamma to papa and me I wil' rite another leter soon from your duty full dauter mary vale willing."

Victoria did not read this continuously as it was written. She often stopped to kiss some quaintly spelled word, which reminded her so much of the writer. Her tears flowed fast as she read the words of Andrew, which he had not dreamed his child would remember and repeat. Ah, how he loved her, and how she loved him, even if he had sinned. He had repented, and every day he was atoning for that sin. She kissed the paper which she knew his lips had pressed, and folding it she placed it in her bosom. As she did so she raised her eyes to meet those of an elderly lady fastened in surprise and consternation upon her. The spirited horses dashed by, and the lady had passed, but not before Victoria had recognized her mother, who she felt sure had also recognized her. This was something for which Victoria was totally unprepared, and taken unawares she had allowed an exclamation of surprise to escape from her lips, while she could almost hear the name "Victoria," as she saw it formed by the proud thin lips of Lady Vale as she had passed.

Not one word had Victoria ever received from her mother since the day upon which Lady Vale had left "The Gables." From her guardian she had heard twice; once to tell her that according to her father's will, she had forfeited all right to her marriage dower, and that in the event of her mother's death it would revert to Miss Dora Vale, her cousin; and the second letter was an acknowledgement of the receipt of her letter telling of Roger's death, and expressing sorrow at her bereavement. That was all. She had written to her mother several times. She knew that the letters had been received, or they would have been returned, but Lady Vale kept complete silence. Victoria's last letter had been sent when Mary was two week's old. Her heart was so full of love; she was so proud of her treasure, that she wanted everybody to share in her joy; and she had thought when her mother should read that letter—which ignored the past, and spoke only of Victoria's happiness, and God's goodness to her—that her heart would soften toward her daughter, and there would be peace between them; but Lady Vale might



have been dead, so totally did she ignore all communication from Victoria, and Andrew, thoroughly incensed at her treatment of her only child, forbade Victoria from ever holding any converse with her mother, even if in after years she should wish to become reconciled. So Lady Vale's face came upon Victoria as one risen from the dead, and to Lady Vale the shock was the same.

"Drive home immediately," said Victoria to the coachman, and then, overcome by all which had transpired that day, she buried her face in her hands and wept bitterly. She felt safe no longer. Her mother, knowing her to be in London, would manage in some way to discover her abiding place, and once discovered, her secret, which she was guarding with such jealous care, would become known to all the world, and Andrew's life would be in danger, to say nothing of the shame and disgrace which such a discovery would bring upon herself and Mary. For awhile her thoughts were chaotic. Her brain refused to act, and seemed to her to burn within her head, and she wondered if she were going mad. Oh, for a sight of the good doctor, for a sound of his calm voice wisely counseling her. She had not a friend in whom she could confide. Not one. She stood as completely alone as if all belonging to her were indeed dead.

Suddenly a ray of light came to her. This old bank clerk, if he should prove to be her uncle, dare she trust him? Yes, she felt that she might. Truth, fidelity, honesty, were all depicted on that sad, careworn face. He had no doubt in his long life been the recipient of many secrets, and the tie of blood which she felt sure she could claim would bind him to her. Her heart felt lighter as she reasoned, her brain became more clear, and by the time she had arrived at the little villa, she had begun to take a calmer view of things, and had determined not to flee from her present abode until matters had become more serious. London was a vast city. The chances were that her mother—even if she should take the trouble—would never find her.

At four o'clock she drove to the dingy lodging house in Depthford Road, and bade the coachman inquire for James Vale. He gingerly mounted the worn steps, and as gingerly rung the antiquated bell, which shook and shivered as if with an ague fit under his savage pull.



These strange fancies of his mistress were not to his liking at all. He had lived in high-born families, had been accustomed to driving none but titled ladies, and these low tastes of this new mistress filled his soul with disgust. Not once since he had been in her employ had she driven to a fashionable house, and taken ladies like herself for a drive, but she must needs prowl about in all the dirty back streets, picking up ragged and deformed children to fill her carriage, which he was expected to dust and clean after the drive; and now here was another new freak. She had no respect for herself, and no regard for the welfare of her servants, exposing them all to contagious disease by this wilful running after the slums of London. He would give in his notice that very day, and tell her that he was satisfied with his position except for one thing. It was very humiliating to himself, and beneath the dignity of a first-class coachman, who had never driven anything but quality, to ringing fourth-class lodging house bells, and cleaning carriages after the ruff-scurf of London had ridden in them. He had a deeply injured look upon his face as he waited to assist these new people into the carriage, but the look changed to one of surprise, as James Vale with his little granddaughter in his arms, came down the steps with a glad smile on his thin lips. In spite of his worn clothing, in spite of the humble abode from which he had just issued, there was so much of the true gentleman in his manner, that the coachman involuntarily touched his hat and assisted him to a seat with as much grace as though the old gentleman had been of the nobility.



## CHAPTER IV.

VICTORIA greeted James Vale with a kindly smile, and looking at him closely, she imagined she could trace a likeness in the sad, careworn face to that of her father as she remembered it; and then she turned her attention to little Dora, who sat upon her grandfather's knee, silent and shy. She was a dainty little maiden, frail as a tender flower, and as beautiful. Her great, blue eyes gazed in wonder at all the strange things she saw about her. Victoria longed to take the little form in her arms; to press it tightly to her aching heart; to murmur loving words over the soft, golden curls so much like her darling's. She held out her hand. "Will you not come to me, little one?" she asked in a trembling voice so full of tears that the old man looked wonderingly at her. "Forgive me," she added, smiling through her tears, "forgive me for seeming so childish, but my arms have been empty for ages it seems to me. Little Dora resembles my baby girl so much. I think this pain at my heart would vanish, could I feel the touch of her tiny fingers."

James Vale without a word placed Dora in Victoria's outstretched arms, which clasped the child close, close to her breast, and the mother love, which had been starving for food, rained kisses on the sweet, upturned face. The child was not frightened. Love begets love, and Victoria was showering all the pent-up love of her heart on this little stranger, who so resembled Mary, and who she also believed was of her blood.

"Boo'ful lady," exclaimed the child, pointing at Victoria with a tiny finger, and looking inquiringly at her grandfather. "Boo'ful lady ky. Dodo ky, too," and suiting the action to the word, she was about to raise her voice in sympathy with Victoria, but James Vale, raising his hand, said quickly: "No, no! Dora must not cry. Kiss the lady, Blossom, and tell her you will love her; put your arms around her neck and hug her as you do grandfather."



Dora immediately complied, and as Victoria felt the pressure of those baby arms, her turbulent soul became quiet; her heart felt relieved of its pain. "What a magical healer," she said, smiling at James Vale, who was on the point of tears himself. And passers-by turned to look after the open carriage, and wonder at the unusual sight of a richly-dressed lady whose beautiful face was radiant with smiles, though tears were coursing down her cheeks, while she held the child tightly pressed to her, the tiny arms clasped closely about her neck.

As Victoria became calm she began to think how best to get this man's history; in what way to approach him so as to verify her suspicions that he was indeed her uncle.

"You spoke of your daughter dying and leaving this little one," she said. "Was she a widow? You did not mention anybody else having a claim upon little Dora beside yourself."

James Vale's face darkened, and a bitter expression came upon it. "She was worse than widowed!" he exclaimed fiercely. "She was betrayed, deceived by a villian, who drove her to her grave, who broke her heart—curses upon him! If I should meet him I should not think it a crime to kill him. It would be justice."

As he paused Victoria laid her hand upon his arm. "You, too, have become acquainted with a grief which is worse than death. Tell me your history. I do not ask out of mere idle curiosity. I have a strong motive in wishing to know all about you. I may be of service to you, and when you have done with your history I will tell you mine, and a sadder one you will say you have never heard."

James Vale glanced at Victoria questioningly. "A stranger's griefs and sad reminiscences can hardly interest a lady such as you," he said.

Victoria nodded her head. "Don't hesitate, Mr. Vale, or if you do I will begin your history for you. Let us say that perhaps years ago when quite a lad you lived, moved and had your being in quite different circumstances from those which surround you at present. In short, you were the younger son of a titled English gentleman, and because you chose to fall in love with a



governess, and were honorable enough to marry her, your father promptly disinherited you."

James Vale had been regarding Victoria with mute astonishment as he listened to her words, but as she paused he almost rose from his seat in his excitement and exclaimed: "How did you know that? Who has been informing you of events in my life which for years have never passed my lips to other than my family?"

Victoria smiled and placed her hand upon that of the old man. "I will enlighten you in good time," she said so gravely that he was convinced of the truth of her words. "Mr. Vale, I have a right to know your life's history, believe me, it is of vital interest to us both that you tell it me."

He hesitated no longer. "I will do as you request," he said. "How you became acquainted with my early life I of course know not, but you have been informed aright. My father was Lord Arthur Vale, a proud, stern man, not wealthy by any means, but counting birth and honor far above all gold. I had an elder brother, Arthur, headstrong, willful, but he was my father's favorite because to him would fall the title and landed estates, while to me would come only a small annuity, which had been my mother's, but which was at the option of my father to dispose of as he pleased, if I in any way displeased him. In time Arthur married a high-born lady, the Honorable Augusta Champeney. My father was delighted with the marriage, and selected a young girl who had been one of the bridesmaids as my future wife. Lady Anna Dunstry was her name, and she was very pretty although shallow minded. My father told me that he desired me to propose to this young lady, and I being already deeply in love with a governess employed by Sir George Wilson, our nearest neighbor, flatly refused. My father coaxed, and finally threatened, so that becoming weary of his continual hectorings, I proposed to my love that we go quietly up to London and be made one. At first she refused, but I pleaded hard, urging her to consent, for I feared if my father heard of our betrothal he would in some way separate us. At last yielding to my prayers my fair love accompanied me to London. In two days we returned, and with my wife clinging to my arm in mortal terror, I



sought my father's presence. Never shall I forget his anger. He drove us from the house with curses. In a few days he died, and I found myself disinherited, with only fifty pounds in my pocket, and two mouths to feed; but I was young and hopeful. I took my wife to London, and soon found employment in a mercantile house where the work was very laborious while the pay was correspondingly small; but we lived, and labor was sweet to me because I was toiling for those I loved. One child after another came to us, only to remain for a little time. That was the only sorrow we had. Finally little Dora came and stayed. I named her after my dear mother. Arthur often wrote to me, and at every child's birth sent a gift, all his slender purse could afford. When Dora came and I wrote to him what name we had given her, Arthur was delighted and sent her a hundred pounds. He had wanted to name his only child after our mother, but his wife had settled upon the name of Victoria, and would not be denied. As Dora grew she blossomed into as fair a maiden as ever lived. She was scarcely a year old when my brother died leaving rather a strange will. In the event of his daughter marrying against her mother's or guardian's wishes, or before she reached her majority, his estates and money were to revert to his widow, and and after her death they were to fall to Dora without restriction. A copy of the will was sent me. My brother's widow often came to London, but she never took the trouble to hunt us up, or to try and heal the breach between us, and I being the poverty stricken one, was too proud to make advances, and the thought of my brother's little fortune ever becoming Dora's never entered my head, but one day, as Dora was nearing womanhood, a white-haired man drove up to the office where I was employed and told his errand. He was Victoria Vale's guardian, and he came to tell me that some day Dora might receive what had once been intended for Victoria. She had married an American, and had forfeited all right to her dower, and Dora was now the heiress of Lady Vale. We were not glad, my gentle wife and I. We saw trouble in store for all of us. In all probability Lady Vale would want Dora to live with her, and my wife at once said: 'We cannot part with our one ewe lamb, James,' and I emphatically



endorsed her sentiment. In a short time our fears were verified. Lady Vale called and desired to adopt Dora. We declined to part with her, and Lady Vale left in anger, and has never communicated with us since except through her lawyer. She knows of Dora's death. She knows that Dora left a little one, but she has never been to see it, although, according to law it is now her heir. A mother who could repudiate an only daughter, for the simple fault of marrying against her wishes, could hardly be supposed to forgive those who had opposed her as we had done. My only fear is that my little blossom will perhaps some day fall into her clutches, and her cold, stern nature would kill this little sensitive plant in no time. Once I thought Lady Vale the most winsome, the most charming of women, but disappointments have soured her, until she is no longer the same."

The old man became silent, and gazed out over the country road they were now driving through. Victoria had chosen this road but little used, because here she was not likely to meet her mother, and they could drive for miles without coming in sight of a human habitation.

"There is one thing you have not mentioned," she said at last. "You have not told me of Dora's husband."

James Vale winced. "He was not her husband," he said sadly. He had another wife living when he married Dora, although at the time, of course, she was ignorant of it. He was an artist or pretended to be. He met Dora at a country house where she had gone to visit a school friend, and when she returned after an absence of a few weeks, he followed close after, and asked me for her hand. I did not like him. I told him I could not give my only child to a stranger. He must not ask it. Dora was but a child. He left me, apparently satisfied, but I found out, when too late, that he filled Dora's head with chimeral stories, and finally she came to me, and laying her bright head on my shoulder said she could not live if her lover was sent away, and that she would follow him; and she reminded me of the time when her mother and I were both young; and against my better judgment I consented, but when I saw her so happy, and when she blessed me for acceding to her



wishes, I could not regret what I had done, though I knew it might bring her sorrow. We would not consent to her leaving us, so they married, and Dora was like a bird singing from morning till night. They had been married little more than a year, and I was becoming reconciled to my son-in-law although he had done but little toward keeping the house. He puttered a little at his painting, with Dora hanging about him, but I never saw a completed picture of his. Many were begun but none were ever finished. One day he said he must go away on business, and he wanted to take Dora with him, but her mother would not allow her to travel, for she was in very delicate health. He went away alone and he never came back. He said he would be gone a week. The week came and passed, still he was absent. Dora began to fret, and begged me to go after him, for she knew he must be either sick or dead, but as I knew not where he had gone, I could not very well go after him. Two weeks dragged by and Dora was wild. She had confided to me that he had asked her for some money, and she had drawn nearly all of her marriage dower which was the one hundred pounds which her uncle Arthur had sent me at her birth. I had immediately placed it in bank for her, and on her marriage it had accumulated to quite a sum. When she told me what she had done I made up my mind that we would never see the scoundrel again. At last, after Dora had taken to her bed with a slow fever, there came a letter from him couched in the tenderest terms for her, but calling himself all the vile names ever heard of. 'He was a married man, with children. Dora was not his legal wife. He had loved her so dearly that he had sinned to get her, but now he had wakened to his folly, and she must forgive and forget him. The name under which he had married her, David Griswold, was not his true name. *That she would never know.*'"

"Dora never rallied from that blow. She lived three years, but she took no interest in anything going on around her. Not even the advent of little Dora could break the apathy which bound her."

"Have you ever heard from him since?" asked Victoria?"

"Never," replied the old man. "If I knew where



he could be found I would go to him, and slay him as I would a dog."

Victoria clasped the child to her bosom as if she would shield her from all harm. "That man never loved Dora," she said, "or he could not have left her. Poor girl. What a heritage of sorrow she leaves to this little innocent. Mr. Vale, if you will let me, I will care for her as if she were indeed my own. Who has a better right than I, for am I not her kinsman? Was not my father your brother?"

James Vale did not comprehend her meaning for a moment, as she sat smiling at him. He repeated her words slowly, and then he could not believe them. "I only had one brother," he said. Then the truth burst upon him. He clasped the hands held out to him, and carried them to his lips. "You are Victoria?" he asked.

"I am Victoria," she answered, smiling at his evident pleasure. "Your father disowned you because you married to please yourself. My mother disowned me for the same reason. I have never seen her since then, until to-day I passed her. She recognized me. I knew her at once, although she is much changed. Uncle James, for so I may call you, I hope?" He nodded assentingly. "I am so glad to have found you, for I need advice, good sound advice. I am all alone here in England, except for an imbecile invalid husband, and I must have help in my trouble. What I have to tell must be held sacred by you. It is a terrible secret, and the keeping of it has well nigh killed me."

James Vale pressed Victoria's hand in sympathy. "Rest assured my dear niece that whatever you choose to impart to me concerning you and yours will be held strictly inviolate."

"I knew it," she replied. "Your noble face inspired me with confidence ere I knew that you were of my blood."

Then she began the recital of her sorrow. He listened deeply interested. She told him everything. She told him of her girlish love for Roger; of her aversion to Andrew. Of her supposed widowhood, and of the premature birth of a shapeless thing, which could not even be called child.

She told of Andrew's watchful loving care, and how at last she began to care for him, and, though loving



Roger's memory, she married Andrew who tried faithfully to shield her from every care, and who surrounded her with the tenderest love. She told of the birth of Mary, sweet fair and winsome; of Andrew's deep love for his child; of the child's passionate adoration for her father and there she hesitated, while her face showed the torture which her soul was undergoing.

James Vale understood her emotion, and he stroked her hand soothingly. "Do not tell if it pains you," he said. "I can help you if I do not know the circumstances."

"No, no, you cannot," she interrupted. "I must tell you everything. I want your advice. You cannot give it unless you know the full facts. It is another's sin I must tell you of, and oh, I fear your judgment will be harsh. That you will say things against the absent one who is not here to plead his cause. Things which will hurt me because they are said against him.

"I promise to fairly judge," replied her uncle. "I will not say anything to wound you."

"It is my husband, Andrew Willing, of whom I now speak," she continued. "Judge him as leniently as you can for he has suffered, bitterly suffered, and every day he is expiating his sin." Then with many hesitations, with many tears, she unburdened her heart, and when she had done she felt better. The load which had weighed her to the ground was lifted, and was being born by one of her own flesh and blood. What a blessed relief this was to Victoria, can only be devined by those who have borne similar burdens.

James Vale was shocked, horrified at the tale. His eyes sought the dense woods through which they were passing, so that Victoria might not see the horror in them. He had thought that his Dora had been the most stricken of women, but here was one whose sorrows had been legion. Sorrows before which Dora's wrongs sank into insignificance.

"God pity and help you!" he said, at last. "You are indeed sorely pressed."

"And now," continued Victoria, "comes this new difficulty. What shall I do if my mother should discover my hiding place which she is very likely to do. I dare not drive every day for fear of meeting her, and the drives are Roger's chief pleasures. Can you advise me?"



"I see no way but for you to leave London, my dear Victoria."

"Ah, but this home for children which is hardly in working order, and as yet I have found no competent man to take full charge of everything. A number have applied but some thing is the matter with all of them. Oh, Uncle James, a thought has just come to me. Will you be my superintendent? What a care will be taken from my shoulders if you only will. You are just the man to fill the position."

"It is a great responsibility, Victoria."

"Ah, yes, but think of all the good you can do, and, besides, your duties would not be as hard as they are now. You would be your own master. May I ask what your salary is at present?"

"Forty pounds a quarter, Victoria. A princely salary you see."

"Forty pounds!" she echoed. "Why, that is barely more than three pounds a week. How do you manage to exist?"

"We did very well while my wife lived," he answered, sadly. "She was an excellent manager, but now it is oftentimes hard to keep the wolf from the door. Her sickness and death was a heavy strain on my slender purse."

"If you will become my overseer, or, rather my general right hand man, I will give you forty pounds weekly, and consider myself extremely fortunate at that."

James Vale looked at Victoria. The offer was magnificent. "It would be robbery," he said, quietly.

"Ah, no, dear uncle. I cannot get a competent man for less, and then perhaps he may not prove competent. You, whom I can trust, will take the position, I know. Then I shall feel free to leave London, possibly England, and take up my residence in exile far from here. It is my wish. Will you consent?"

And James Vale consented, for he saw that Victoria was in earnest, and when the carriage drew up at his humble abode, and he alighted, with the sleeping child in his arms, it was with the promise that he should come to Victoria early in the morning.



## CHAPTER V.

AND so after a few days of bustle and hurry, Victoria once more took up her wanderings. Her uncle was her constant companion, and when he bade her adieu at the station, she felt as if everything which she had been obliged to leave undone would be looked after as conscientiously as if she were by his side. She had pleaded to be allowed to take Dora with her, and James Vale consented most willingly. She needed a woman's care, who else could care for her as tenderly as Victoria who loved her most dearly, and Dora clung to her new found friend as if she had discovered in her a second mother.

Victoria had decided to visit some parts of Scotland, and having heard much of the beauties of the Firth of Forth, she decided to go there for a time and take up her residence at Leith; but she had not been there long when she saw a decided change for the worse in Roger. The air did not agree with him, so of course she must find some other place in which the invalid could be comfortable. He always seemed better when at sea, so she decided to try sailing for a time. A slow sailing vessel was to start for Aberdeen in a few days, and she engaged passage for her party on the ship. At Aberdeen she would rest for a few days until she had determined where to go and what to do; but before the ship reached Aberdeen she had decided. On the voyage she overheard two sailors talking. They were evidently strangers, and were forming each other's acquaintance.

"Wheer do'est the hail fra' lad?" asked one.

"Fra' Duncausby Head, mon," replied the other, "an' a' wish a' ha' neer left it."

"Duncausby Head! Duncausby Head! Wheer be thot noo? Be et far fra' here?"

The other laughed uproarously. "Weel thou art fash, I ween. Wheer ha' thee lived all tha' life?"

"I' Edinburgh," replied the first sailor, rather testily. He did not enjoy the teasing laugh of his companion.



"Eh, mon, tha' should coom wi' me ti' my hame. I'll be gooin' back soon. Theer I can be free an' happy."

"But wheer be it? Do goold grow on trees theer? thou art so fast ti goo back."

"Noo goold grows on trees anywheer's, tha' fule, but Duncausby Head ha' buried treasures, an I know et. Ha' ye neer heerd tell o' John de Groot, a man wi' a nasty temper, wha' could na' live peaceably wi' his seven brothers, so he built a house wi' eight sides till it; every side wi' its own dure, so tha' eight brothers could na' quarrel one wi' tha' ither?"

"A tale o' tha' fairies," exclaimed the listener incredulously.

"It be no idle tale I say. Coom wie me an' I show it thee. I ha' been in it mony a time. It be tha' ferry-house wheer thee lands fra' t' Orkney Isles, i' Pentland Firth. Theer be gude fishin' for all who may wish, an' I like fishin' better nor sailin', so I be gooin' bock soon, an' thee be welcome ti' coom along wi' me. Nae sickness ever cooms theer. We ha' nae doother i' tha' place."

Victoria listened at first languidly to the two men's conversation, and then with interest. Why would not Duncausby Head be a safe retreat for her, and health-giving to Roger. She resolved to question this sailor at the first opportunity. She did so, and his answers were so satisfactory that she decided to push right on to Duncausby Head, and there abide. Upon arriving at Aberdeen she staid long enough to get a good Scotch woman, and traveling leisurely she at last reached the place where we now find her, five years after leaving America.

Little Dora was now eight years old, and had grown stout and robust, with a Scotch color in her cheeks which would have delighted her grandfather could he have seen it. But for this child Victoria must have gone mad. Her sweet coaxing ways kept green the heart-starving for those it so dearly loved in old Virginia. There were days when the winds and tempests raged about the little point; when it was not safe for man or beast to venture out. On such days when Victoria was housed with Roger, whose health was slowly failing, and who was peevish and sometimes ugly in consequence, the presence of the sweet child with her wise babblings, was



like a ray of brightest sunshine to the heart-sick woman, and she lavished all the pent-up love which had waited so long upon Dora, who returned Victoria's caresses a thousand fold.

As Roger grew weaker he became more exacting. He knew Victoria's voice and touch from any other, and if she left him for even a moment, he would howl and beat the air with his fists until she again appeared, and laid her hands upon him. She had sent for a physician, who told her that no change of climate would be beneficial to the invalid. He was as well off in one place as another. It was only a question of time.

"Only a question of time." Those had been Dr. Harrison's words five year's ago; still Roger was living, and how long, perhaps another five years. Victoria can hardly be blamed for the thoughts which would come to her. She did not wish for Roger's death, but she wondered how long *she* could endure this, to her, living death. Every day the question occurred to her, and every night when she retired she had a fear that when the morning should dawn, it would find her insane. She felt little Dora to be her guardian angel, and many a time after a hard battle with Roger—who showed wonderful strength for one so weak—she would take the child in her arms and sob her heart out on the tender little breast. Ah, yes! She was being punished for the guilty thoughts which once had possessed her for Andrew's sake.

The mail came very uncertain to Duncausby Head. Sometimes for weeks Victoria did not hear from home, but she did not rebel at that. If any of her dear ones died she could not reach them in time to once more gaze upon their faces. If they were ill she did not wish to know of it. Better death and the knowledge of it, than illness with uncertainty, but every letter brought nothing but good news. All were in the best of health. Mary was a big girl now, and printed her letters no more. She wrote with a bold, free hand, which told Victoria of that other hand which had been her tutor. Nothing went on at home of the least moment but that was told in graphic language to Victoria, who sometimes closed her eyes and imagined herself back at "the Five Gables," seated beside the lake, with Andrew by her side, and Mary at her feet.



To waken from that dream so real; to waken with Roger's wild cries ringing in her ears, as he struggled with Adam in mad frenzy over the bug bugging in his head; this was her trial which sometimes she bore with resignation, and again with bitter complainings to God, asking upon her knees if her punishment was to endure forever.

Victoria had changed, and who could wonder that she had. She was not quite forty in years, but she felt aged to twice that number, because of the many trials through which she had passed. Time had dealt lightly with her beautiful hair. The same sunny sheen was upon it as in her younger days, but the sweet laughing mouth had grown serious, while little lines had formed around the full lips, as if they had often been drawn with pain and suffering. But the eyes told of what Victoria had endured more than all else about the face. A stranger, meeting her as she was walking on the sands, would know at a glance that some great grief had come to this woman. Some terrible agony had she passed through which had left its imprint in the sorrowful eyes with a nameless something in their depths hard to define but touching in the extreme.

The rough sailors and fishermen bowed before her chastened beauty, as a devotee bows before a shrine. To them she was a ministering angel, who had known sorrow and grief. She had come among them a stranger, but she had soon endeared herself to every man, woman and child. Many a widow, whose husband slept under the turbulent Firth, had cause to bless the sweet lady whose few spoken words, and tender hand clasp, won their hearts far more than the generous roll of bills left behind as she departed from their homes.

Many an old decrepid whose days of usefulness were done, living in his lonely hut, counted the hours till the fair, sad eyed lady should come to read or talk with him, and who never left without some substantial reminder of her coming. There was not a man among that little community, but what if called upon, would have cheerfully laid down his life in her behalf, for at all times since her advent had she proved a lady bountiful to the whole village. To her this was a restful haven, and although separated far from those she loved,



yet in the spirit she was always with them, and they with her.

One day there came a letter from the doctor, and the news it contained made her sorrowful for many a day. It said: "Some startling news has come to Andrew, verified by papers and affidavits. The mulatto, who has been Rogers attendant, is Bella's boy, and Andrew's half brother; and what is more he knows it, and has kept it to himself. The old woman who took him away when but a little lad, told him of his parentage when on her death bed, and bade him seek his kindred, giving him the necessary credentials to establish his birth without a doubt. His tongue was cut out by a cruel overseer, for Adam was of a hot, passionate temperament, as who could doubt, knowing his parentage, and brooding over some wrong would have killed the overseer if he had not been caught before he had accomplished his purpose. While Andrew was in doubt as to the best way of bringing Roger home—after he had sufficiently recovered from the railroad accident to be removed with safety—Adam appeared to him as he was riding home from the plantation. By Adam's signs Andrew soon discovered his misfortune, and he saw how he could make good use of this tongueless man. He immediately took him to the old monastery, and left him to care for Roger while he hastened home, and under cover of the night, with his own hands, arranged the book case which stood before the closed door leading to the gabled room. It was all easily accomplished without suspicion, for you of course, was prostrated with grief, and took heed of nothing; and two month's after Roger's supposed death, Andrew, with the assistance of Adam, had transferred his brother from the monastery to the gabled room. Question Adam. Tell him you know the secret of his birth."

It was some days ere Victoria could bring herself to question Adam. The letter had again brought Andrew's crime most vividly before her, and if such a thing were possible, there seemed to have come an added sorrow into the sad depths of her mournful eyes, but one day when Roger's chair had been wheeled out upon the sands, and Adam, who was a most tireless attendant, was stretched full length beside the invalid, then did Victoria with a tremor in her voice, tell Adam of the



letter which had come from old Virginia. He did not seem surprised but smiled and nodded his head, while he touched the breast pocket of his coat.

"Have you something there telling who you are?" she asked.

With another smile he drew forth papers, yellow with age, and gave them to Victoria. She perused them with bitter tears. Yes, indeed, here was evidence in plenty, and as she finished reading she looked up to find the mulatto's eyes bent upon her, questioning, and, as she thought, pleadingly.

"Do you wish to be acknowledged as this man's brother?" she asked, pointing to Roger.

Adam shook his head frowning slightly, while he motioned first to himself and then out to sea.

"Do you wish to be free?" she asked again. "Do you want your freedom papers with plenty of money?"

This time Adam laughed and bowed, then turning to Roger he placed his hand upon his arm and shook his head pointing to the ground solemnly, while he looked sadly at Victoria.

"I understand," she said, "you wish to remain with us until—until Roger shall be laid away. Then you will, in spite of your misfortune, seek a new land where you may find a wife perhaps?"

Here Adam gesticulated violently, pointing to Victoria, then to some little children playing on the beach, then folding his arms he rocked gently to and fro while a bright smile irradiated his face.

"Ah, you are already married and have children?" exclaimed Victoria, while Adam, delighted that his mistress had understood him, knelt and kissed the hem of her gown.

"Very well Adam, I will see that all your wishes are complied with," she said, gently placing her hand upon his shoulder. "You have been faithful and devoted. For many years you have been separated from your family. You may never find them."

He quickly drew from his pocket another paper, and Victoria, upon opening it, found it to be a roughly drawn affidavit, that before Justice McEuen, Adam Spencer, bond servant of George Spencer, of Raleigh, N. C., and Rosa Jefferson, bond servant of James Jefferson, of Raleigh, N. C., had been made man and wife according



to the laws of North Carolina regarding the marrying of slaves.

"Is this George Spencer the master from whom you ran away?" asked Victoria.

Adam again nodded his head.

"Would you like to have me write to him and buy you from him, and find out if Rosa Jefferson and her children still live in Raleigh; for, of course, your former master could claim you if you did not show freedom papers from him."

Adam delightedly danced upon the sands, extravagantly waving his hands and trying vainly to articulate his pleasure at Victoria's words, and that same night Victoria wrote to the doctor all she had learned, and begged him without delay to do everything necessary to free Adam.

Shortly after this another letter came, this time from James Vale, who, yielding to her frequent pleadings, was about to take a needed and well-deserved vacation, and would follow his letter as fast as land and water would permit, and who would be with her ere she knew.

Victoria was glad. The kindly compassionate face of her uncle would be most strengthening to her fast-failing courage. His wise counsel a safe prop on which to lean. How she longed this moment for a sight of him. Ah, she wished the letter had not come, but that he had taken her by surprise.

The next day James Vale arrived, and Victoria had need of his strengthening arm; his calm quiet voice; his never-failing wise judgment, for a grim messenger had arrived before him, and had summoned Roger to that land, where once more he should see, and the poor head should again be made clear. He had retired apparently in no worse health than usual, and Adam had watched beside him till he fell asleep. In the morning when Adam awoke, surprised at not having been disturbed through the night, as usual; he arose from his couch and approached the bed. Roger lay with a sweet peaceful smile on his face, at rest at last. Something in the quiet form struck a chill to Adam's heart, and placing his hand upon Roger's forehead, he found it quite cold. He had gone away forever.

When Victoria was told no gladness mingled with her grief; only a thankfulness that at last the poor clouded



brain was at rest. She did not sorrow for him, he was infinitely better off, but she sorrowed for the Roger of by-gone days, and for herself she wept. She went and stood beside the silent form; she gazed at the quiet face which seemed to her to take on the youthful look when first she had known him, and tears for her young husband, for her first love, flowed unrestrainedly. The past twenty years seemed but a dream. She was once more a youthful bride, and Roger, her beloved, was again all in all to her. Raining kisses on his peaceful face, she whispered words of love into his ears, closed forever, and when James Vale arrived, it was to find Victoria beside the bier of Roger, and talking to him as if he could hear and understand. The brave woman who had suffered her trials for so many years with such rare endurance, had at last succumbed.

Roger had been laid away for quite three weeks ere Victoria regained her reason. At times the angel of death hovered very near, and James Vale thought he could even hear the flutter of his wings, but to Victoria was yet reserved, much of joy, and much of sorrow. The time had not come for her to depart. When she had become convalescent, then, and not till then, did James Vale tell her of another death, her mother's. It had come suddenly—a paralytic stroke. She died as she had lived, unforgiving, and little Dora was heir to what was left, which had proved but little after all had been settled.

Victoria wept for the mother who had been a loving, indulgent parent until her child had crossed her will, and who had proved so unforgiving to the end. The tears were more for the parent of her childhood. How else could she mourn.

James Vale had written to America of Roger's death. In those days news traveled slowly, and it was fully six weeks after Victoria's illness, that one day, with Dora as companion, she went to visit Roger's grave. A rustic bench had been fashioned by one of the villagers, and presented to Victoria, whose sorrow was respected by every rough man in the village. She seated herself, and drew Dora to her side. The quietness of the place soothed her, and her thoughts turned to the dear old home far, far away. What was Mary doing at this moment, and Andrew, where was he? Ah, if she only had



wings to fly, how quickly would she traverse the distance, and alight at the door of her home—the home where all her great sorrows had been born, and where most exquisite joys had been hers. Hark! She thought she heard her name breathed softly, tenderly. Dora had heard it too, and had started from Victoria's encircling arm.

"Cousin Victoria," she whispered, "look there, the other side of cousin Roger's grave!"

Before Victoria raised her eyes she knew what she was about to behold. A delicious tremor shook her frame. She felt as if her heart was being drawn from her body. She lifted her trembling eyelids, and a cry burst from her lips. Andrew, holding Mary by the hand, stood beside Roger's grave. His eyes were fastened upon her. His heart spoke through his eyes. It said: "Come to me!" One hand he held outstretched.

Victoria arose. She placed her hands upon her eyes, then withdrew them. The vision was still there. She stepped hesitatingly forward, her eyes fixed upon Andrew; then, her form bending like a reed, swayed to and fro, and Andrew, unloosing Mary's clasp, sprang forward and caught the fainting form of her who never more should leave him, in his arms.

FINIS.



























MRS. MARY J. HOLMES' PUBLICATIONS.

ASHES,

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS,  
A FAIR PURITAN,

THE HOUSE OF FIVE GABLES.

READ THE FOLLOWING OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

The "*Bridgeport Standard*," writing of the "Sins of the Fathers," says:

This new work by Mrs. Holmes will, we think, continue and increase the favorable opinions of her literary capacity made by her first book, and the many readers of that will find the same qualities strengthened somewhat perhaps in this. Mrs. Holmes has chosen what might be called a "domestic theme," for the lives and sufferings, the plots and successes, the faults and failures of character entirely in the private sphere of life, would bring the story within that designation. In the portrayal of character, the weaving of plot and counter-plot, the injection of action which awakens interest, and in the general unfolding of a tale which keeps one reading unwearied to the end, Mrs. Holmes is surely successful, and her rank is destined to be no mean one among the acknowledged novelists of our time.

The "*Albany Journal*," speaking of "Ashes," writes:

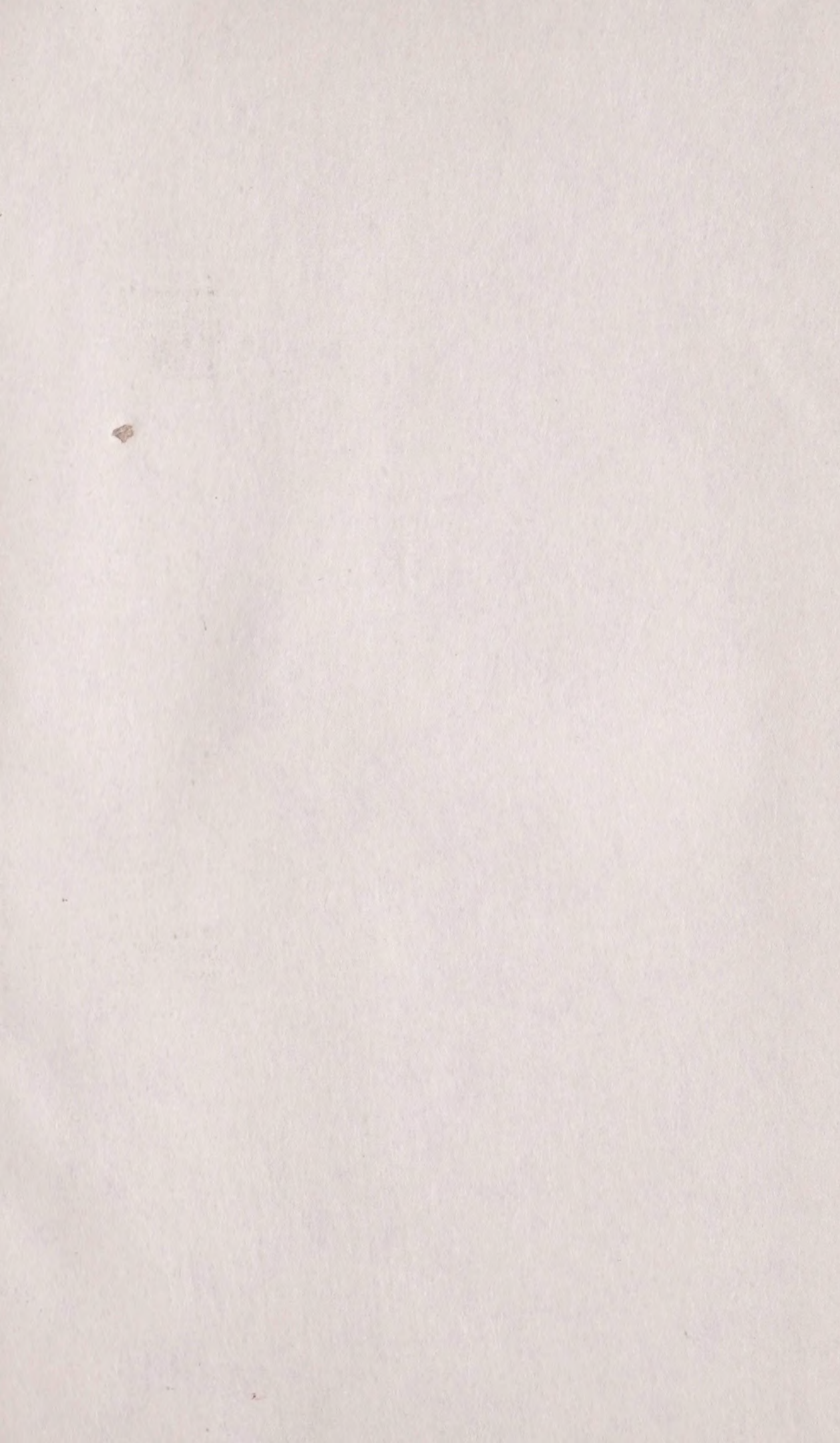
This is a tale of a weak, frail girl, guided by her impulses, through trouble and sorrow, until she was brought to see the folly of acting on the spur of the moment. This book has many good points, and the author has worked with a good purpose to good results.

A FAIR PURITAN, by Mary Johnson Holmes, author of *Ashes*; *The Sins of the Fathers*, &c., &c. New York: Hurst & Co., pub.; paper, 50 cents.

This story is one of Mrs. Holmes' best, and it will possess an additional interest to readers in this vicinity, from the fact that the scene is laid in Connecticut, and that Bridgeport and the surrounding towns are a part of its stage setting. The story is well told, full of interesting incident and analysis of character, never dropping below the safe moral standards which Mrs. Holmes always follows, and keeping up the interest of the reader to the end. The plot is well laid and effectively worked out, and the details are studied with a care and faithfulness which is characteristic of the author. It will add to her reputation as a writer and increase the circle of her appreciative readers.

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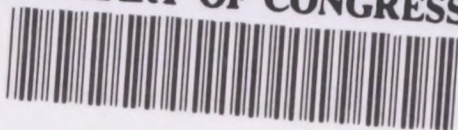








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